# RISK-TAKING & POSTMODERNITY:

## COMMODIFICATION & THE ECSTATIC IN LEISURE LIFESTYLES

## The Case of Surfing

By

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## Abstract

The thesis is a study of surfing in Australia. It examines the surfing subculture and its relationship with the dominant culture; the risk-taking orientation of its bodily practices and the role they play in the construction of individual and group identity and social formations; and the multi-dimensional relationships between the surfing culture industry, surfing's sports bureaucracy, bodily practices, social configurations and subcultural integrity. The study is based on the hypothesis that the surfing subculture in Australia is a distinctly postmodern configuration but one which displays a level of stability not accounted for in postmodern theory. It informs current debates over the nature of the self and society in postmodernity.

The scope of the research was national because previous studies of surfing, both in Australia and the USA, suffered from too narrow a scope; either focussing on one sector or geographic area. The breadth of this study enabled coverage of all sectors, geographic types, and forms of surfing subculture in Australia. Participant observation was undertaken during a ten month field trip to 15 surfing locations, covering all States and surfing location types. The observations were supplemented by recorded interviews with 31 key people, 129 questionnaires administered at 16 specific surfing sites, and an analysis of the surfing media and other documentation.

The thesis concludes that postmodernity provides an environment in which the self can become anchored in the shared transcendent experience of bodily practice, which forms the basis of stable social formations. Through interaction with the sublime in nature, the self 'experiences itself' in communion with the world. This transcendence is both a loss of self and an expanded sense of self, whereby subject and object merge in ecstatic experience. The shared knowledge of ecstatic experience constitutes a *conscience collectif* which underpins the subculture's social formations at the local and global level. The surfing culture industry mediates the experience across the world in images, text and symbolic form. Local neo-tribal formations reinforce the ecstatic experience through their hypercommodified culture and their sociality. Their structure promotes the hyperindividualistic pursuit of ecstatic experience and constitutes a self-perpetuating social configuration whereby these reflexive communities are constantly reconstructed through bodily practice. This aesthetic reflexivity provides a bulwark against alienating bureaucratization and fosters a form of competitive surfing which further reinforces the foundational experience.

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# CHAPTER 1
# INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of surfing in Australia on a national scale[1]. It examines: the surfing subculture and its relationship with the dominant culture; the risk-taking orientation of its bodily practices and its significance for the self, and the construction of individual and group identity and social formations; and the multi-dimensional relationships between the surfing culture industry, surfing's sports bureaucracy, embodied experience, social configurations and subcultural integrity. The study is based on the hypothesis that the surfing subculture in Australia is fundamentally a postmodern configuration, but one which displays a level of stability not accounted for in prominent theories of postmodern social change. The model which this study provides is an inversion of Marx's base and superstructure. In the postmodern world of surfing, the economy (which constituted the base in modernity) is substantially dedifferentiated within the subculture, leaving a flat hypercommodified surface supported by shared experience which forms a *sub*structure beneath that surface.

The primary questions this study addresses are:
1) What is the significance of surfing's risk-taking orientation for the experience of self, identity and community in the current environment of social and cultural change? It is my hypothesis that there is a link between the postmodern condition, risk-taking, the self and group identity.
2) How does the commodification and bureaucratization of surfing, through the culture industry and the development of surfing as a professional sport, influence the dynamic between the embodied experience, self and group identity? It is my hypothesis that the ecstatic

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[1] The surfing subculture addressed here relates to surfboard riding, not surf lifesaving. Its main focus is on surfboards ridden standing up or kneeling, but also includes bodyboarding as a marginal group. Wave ski riders and body surfers could not be included because of their small populations, and windsurfers (who ride waves) generally form a distinct subculture and are not included either. Since the bodily practice of surfing is the main focus of the study I have virtually ignored issues relating to non-surfing women within the subculture. While I have flagged issues relating to women surfers as they arise in each of the chapters, they are not thoroughly addressed, and my intention is that this thesis provides a basis for further study.

experience inherent in the activity of surfing remains at the root of these processes, hence the image of a substructure rather than a superstructure built upon an economic base.

It is not my intention to enter into the debate between those who want to call the current era modern or postmodern - as Kumar (1995: 178) observes, much of the argument hinges on emphasis and terminology. Rather, I provide an ethnographically based case study, which is both informed *by* and provides data *for* a discussion of postmodern theory and related issues concerning the nature of the risk experience, the embodied self, individual and group identity, and the nature of community and solidarity in the contemporary world.

A secondary aim of my thesis is to provide a thorough analysis of the surfing subculture in Australia; a phenomenon worthy of study in its own right. The surfing culture industry is a multi billion dollar concern in which the top three Australian companies rank among the top five internationally. Approximately 2.16 million Australians claim to surf (*Surfing Australia Inc.* 1996: 5), at least on a recreational basis, and at the competitive level Australia has been, and remains, a dominant force, both in the administrative and competitive arenas. But while surfing has made considerable inroads into the mainstream, both as a marketable lifestyle (through its style and image) and as a sport (with popular media coverage of professional surfing, and acceptance as a probationary Olympic sport in 1995), it appears to have retained its subcultural (oppositional) stance. This dual and contradictory character makes it of particular interest.

The last study of surfing at this level was undertaken over two decades ago by the late Kent Pearson (1979 etc.) and significant developments in sportization[2] (Elias 1986) (including professionalization) and industry expansion have taken place in the intervening years. This thesis provides

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[2] Elias & Dunning (1986) describe sportization as part of a 'civilizing spurt' (Elias 1978) which occurred in conjunction with parliamentization in 18th Century England. Parliamentization involved the end of openly violent contests for power between parliamentary factions in favour of the rule of law. Sportization reflected this process in the leisure pursuits of the upper class. It allowed the excitement of the battlefield, in particular euphoria and fear, to be played out under controlled conditions so that real danger was minimized while providing a cathartic release from the tension that emerged out of the constraints on behaviour in polite society. In the current context sportization refers to the same kind of ordering processes upon hitherto untrammeled leisure pursuits; in particular the development of organized competitions and the sports bureaucracies which control them.

an up-to-date sociological analysis of the Australian surfing subculture on a national scale.

The national scope of the research is significant because previous analyses of surfing, in Australia and abroad, have relied upon data from a much narrower source; either restricted to one (usually urban) general location for fieldwork (Farmer 1992; Scures 1986; Versace 1993) or focussing on one particular sector or subgroup - such as the media (Stedman 1997; Stone 1970) or students (Ortiz 1980). The breadth of this study enabled coverage of all sectors, geographic types, and forms of surfing subculture in Australia. Participant observation was undertaken during a ten month field trip to 15 surfing locations, covering all States and surfing location types. The observations were supplemented by recorded interviews with 31 key people, 129 questionnaires administered at 16 specific surfing sites, and an analysis of the surfing media and other documentation.

## Thesis Overview

The idea for the thesis came from two characteristics of surfing culture which appeared to contradict some dominant themes in the literature on social and cultural change. Firstly the risk-taking orientation of surfers runs counter to the reflexive risk management (as risk minimization) which Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) argue is a consequence of the uncertainties of contemporary life. It seemed to me, following Elias' (1986) thesis that organized sport provides a source of mimetic excitement stifled by the civilizing process, that risk oriented sports could be interpreted as a cathartic response to 'risk society'.

The second contradiction is that while the culture embodies so much of what it means to be postmodern, it has not been reduced to its commodified surface. Nor has it followed a modern trajectory and become purely a mainstream sport. Based on my own experience of the subculture, I knew that an identity as an insider was not something which could be purchased along with the surf label clothing; to be a surfer you have to surf. Learning to surf requires a considerable commitment of time and effort. Further, surfing's social configurations are relatively stable formations within a subculture that has maintained a discernible identity since the 1960s, with many original surfers still active insiders.

I hypothesized that the need for commitment over time, and the risk orientation of surfing (i.e. the camaraderie involved in shared risk-taking) were both factors in the stability of these configurations and the integrity of the subculture as a distinct social form. In order to test this hypothesis it was necessary to study these aspects of the subculture across the range of surfing location types, surfer types, sectors (including industry and organizing bodies) and subgroups within the subculture. I knew from experience that the culture varied considerably across the country and that internal conflicts and mainstreaming influences needed to be accounted for beyond the competition oriented urban surfing scene (so often presented as *the* surfing subculture[3]). The role of the surfing culture industry and competitive surfing were crucial elements in this study since many modernist and postmodernist theorists emphasise the negative effects that commodification and bureaucratization can have on experience based social configurations.

A broader critique of postmodern theory emerged out of the analysis, as it inevitably involved asking how such theories might inform an understanding of the subculture, and in turn what might the study have to offer current debates on the topic?

The thesis concludes that postmodernity provides an environment in which the self can become anchored in the shared ecstatic experience induced by the risk-taking bodily practices of surfing. Stable or 'grounded' neo-tribal forms of sociation emerge out of these 'foundational' experiences of self transcendence, which constantly reconstruct themselves through bodily practices. Their structure promotes the hyperindividualistic pursuit of these ecstatic experiences, which underpin all sectors and factions of the subculture at the local and global (symbolic) level. The surfing aesthetic, which has developed from within these neo-tribal structures, is centred around an *appreciation* of the sublime in nature which both mimics and stimulates a desire for the sublime *experienced* in the bodily practice.

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[3] When I use the term 'the surfing subculture' I am referring to the symbolic community which embraces the diversity mentioned here. This point will be developed more thoroughly throughout the thesis.

While I found surfing's social configurations to be stable, and the subculture to have retained a significant degree of distinction from its parent culture, there were two elements within the subculture which threatened this situation. One was the surfing culture industry, which, through its hypercommodification of the culture and commercial activities in the mainstream, could be expected to foster an alienation of the culture from its embodied experience; in Baudrillard's (1988b) terms, to separate the sign from its signified. The other element was the surfing bureaucracy and the rational sportization of surfing which it promoted. Following Habermas (1987) the industry and the bureaucracy could be seen as colonizing the surfing lifeworld.

However, I found this generally not to be the case. The surfing culture industry emerged from within the subculture, subject to its aesthetic reflexivity. Its marketing strategies exploit its insider status, both in the subculture market and in the mainstream. It promotes its products as tokens of a culture and an experience that can only truly be known to those who surf; i.e. its success is based on a strategy which *maintains* the link between sign and signified.

I found an ambivalence towards the rationalization which competition brings to surfing – even amongst the sports bureaucrats and top professionals - which stems from the primary importance afforded the untrammeled thrill of surfing. This ambivalence is also manifest in a dialectic between the imperative to play and to order which appears to be producing two distinct syntheses; one the result of an aestheticization of competitive surfing in tune with the subculture's dominant surfing aesthetic, and the other a product of mainstream incorporation of surfing's bodily practice as a 'wave pool' sporting spectacle.

In conclusion I suggest that surfing subculture provides an example of a postmodern social formation whose stability can be explained by a deeper understanding of the embodied experience upon which it is based. The postmodern environment *facilitates* the subculture's forms of sociation, and it appears likely that similar configurations may be found beneath the commodified surface of postmodern social formations wherever groups of individuals share experience they interpret as significant.

## Thesis Structure

In Chapter 2, I discuss the overarching postmodern theoretical framework which informs this study, and the rationale behind the choice of this particular famework. In Chapter 3 I provide a detailed description of how the study was conducted and give a justification of my choice of research methods. Throughout the rest of the thesis I refer to historical developments and relate micro level phenomena to macro processes in the analysis of surfing culture.

Chapter 4 presents a brief history of surfing from its renaissance at the beginning of the 20th century in Hawaii, to the mainland USA and Australia. A tension between the imperative to play and to order is apparent, especially in the Australian scene, and this conflict becomes an important theme throughout the rest of the thesis. The outline of the current surfing subculture in Australia which follows, shows that the dialectic is manifest in the relationship between the postmodern subculture and its parent culture, which is still in the process of postmodernization. The surfers' resistance to incorporation by the parent culture stems from the value placed on the embodied experience of surfing, while the imperative towards incorporation comes from ordering processes (commodification and bureaucratization) which threaten this hedonistic habitus. The complexity of this relationship is also recognized, in that resistance occurs *via* incorporation; i.e. surfing culture acts as an agent of postmodern aestheticization within the parent culture.

In Chapter 5 the nature and significance of the embodied experience in surfing is discussed. The surfing subculture's orientation towards risk-taking is examined. While other factors, such as the attainment of status and prestige, the development of self confidence, and cathartic benefits are found to be important, they appear to be subordinate as motivating imperatives to the chase for thrills. The thrill is said to be a response to the intensity of focus upon the wave and the bodily interaction with it, such that surfers lose any sense of distinction between their selves and the natural environment in an ecstatic transcendence of self. The experience engenders an addictive response in surfers, who take bigger risks, pushing the limits of their skills in order to achieve the same thrill. The shared knowledge of this experience forms the basis of a *conscience*

*collectif*[4] that is the foundation of all surfing's social forms at the local and global (symbolic) level. Through this shared consciousness and a 'fortified' sociality which emerges out of it, the individual experiences further transcendence within the group. I suggest a model of 'grounded neo-tribalism' which explains the stability of surfing's social configurations consistent with the aestheticization and the breakdown of the social inherent in postmodernity.

Chapter 6 looks at how this risk-taking is expressed within the subculture's symbolic realm. An appreciation of the sublime in nature - in particular the ocean and its waves - is said to be at the heart of the surfing aesthetic. The synthesis between fear and desire inherent in the appreciation of the sublime simulates the ecstatic transcendence experienced in interaction with the ocean, and is mediated through images in the subculture's magazines, films and videos on a global scale. This blurring of the boundaries between the embodied experience of the sublime and the appreciation of the sublime contributes to a derealization of risk which allows the surfer to pursue their thrills in communion with the object of their desire.

But accomplished surfers can experience self transcendence in less challenging surf. For these surfers, the sensual experience of surfing appears to trigger the communion learnt in higher risk encounters, and so appreciation of the sublime in nature need not involve images of awesome power or fear. This, and the dedifferentiation of nature and culture inherent in the surfing aesthetic, represent a freeing up of the sublime in a distinctively postmodern incarnation.

The link between aestheticization and commodification in the surfing media was found to contribute to the dissemination of the surfing aesthetic, and hence the solidarity and stability of its social forms. In Chapter 7 this link is examined in the role of the broader surfing culture industry. The study concentrates on the three largest companies which dominate the industry. Although their position within the subculture is not unproblematic, the corporate culture (which all three share) reflects their insider status; i.e. it is a product of the grounded neo-tribalism and

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[4] Durkheim (1933) described the commonly held values and norms of traditional society as a 'collective conscience' which he said provided the basis of a 'mechanical solidarity'.

distinctive surfing subculture which their activities help create and maintain. While the commodification of surfing culture is found to be all pervasive, it does not act as a process of alienation. This appears to be the case because of the industry's insider status and the inherent reflexivity of the subculture, which ensures that the industry operates as an integral part of the subculture's social and cultural lifeworld based upon the shared ecstatic experience of surfing. The industry therefore contributes to the stability of social configurations, and the integrity of the subculture;

i) through the dissemination of the global surfing aesthetic in the symbolic realm; and

ii) through the construction and maintenance of symbolic boundaries between the subculture and its parent culture.

Further, the industry is found to dominate not only the subculture market, but also the mainstream market; a process whereby, I suggest, surfing acts as an agent of postmodernization. But the industry's success in the mainstream market threatens its links with the subculture and, because of the central role it plays in the construction and maintenance of the boundaries between the subculture and its parent culture, the integrity of the subculture is also threatened. The most significant arena for this kind of fragmenting expansion is in the industry's links with the sportization of surfing.

The sportization of surfing is examined in Chapter 8. The dialectic between the imperative to play and to order, which has characterized Australian's beach activities since the 19th Century, has remained a defining conflict within the surfboard riding subculture. In the contemporary surfing scene it is found to be manifest between those oriented to competitive surfing and those who reject this kind of ordering of hedonistic play. The sportization of surfing is promoted by the surfing bureaucracy while the surfing culture industry backs both sides of the conflict, sponsoring professional competitors and competitions, while adopting the counter culture's anti-competition ethic as part of its marketing strategies. Current developments suggest a fragmentation or even a potential split within the subculture as two distinct syntheses emerge out of this dialectic: one as a result of the aestheticization of competition (developed by the surfing culture industry) which maintains the connection *with* and contributes *to* the current surfing aesthetic, in particular the appreciation of the sublime and the ecstatic experience of

high risk surfing; the other is the development of wave pool competitions which is a synthesis between competitive surfing and the dominant sports culture. This latter development entails a break with the current aesthetic since it has no connection with the appreciation of the sublime in nature; it represents a mainstream postmodern development in tune with the notion of simulation and hyperrationalization. Because of its playful nature and the bodily skills inherent in wave pool surfing, I suggest that the activity could spawn the same kind of grounded neo-tribal configurations found in the current surfing subculture; based upon shared knowledge of ecstatic experience and involving the development of its own aesthetic and incarnation of the sublime.

The thesis concludes that the stability of surfing's social configurations is based upon the shared knowledge of what I call 'foundational experience'; the ecstatic experiences of self transcendence which the bodily practice of surfing can provide. The surfing subculture in Australia encompasses a number of sectors (including the surfing culture industry and competitive surfing), factions and conflicts. The shared knowledge of ecstatic experience underpins and unites these grounded subgroups in a symbolic community. The integrity of the subculture is due to a significant extent to the position of the surfing culture industry as 'insiders', and the role it plays in constructing and maintaining symbolic boundaries and a global surfing aesthetic. The model of 'grounded' neo-tribalism I develop provides a means of understanding the more stable social configurations which form around bodily practices outside the surfing subculture. This is especially the case (although not exclusively so) for those practices requiring significant commitment to master the skills involved, and which engender that commitment through the desire for the ecstatic experience it promises to provide. Further, I suggest that similar configurations may well be found beneath the surface of apparently self-centred practices and depthless forms of sociation; wherever shared experience of any kind has significant meaning for those involved. These experience based configurations constitute what I refer to as a postmodern substructure beneath the commodified surface.

# CHAPTER 2
# A POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE

> *The contemporary world may not be simply or only post-modern; but post-modernity is now a significant, perhaps central, feature of its life, and an important way of thinking about it. (Kumar 1995: 195).*

While I have integrated the majority of theoretical analysis within the body of the thesis, in this chapter I outline the overarching postmodern framework adopted for the study. I locate the study within the relevant theoretical debates, and argue the case for taking this approach.

First I explain the rationale behind the particular postmodern framework adopted and the manner in which I engage other modern and neo-modern theories. Second I detail the analytic structure and explain the way in which it will be used to inform the study of surfing. Finally I provide a brief overview of the theoretical journey covered by the thesis.

## *This* Postmodern Framework

There is no dominant postmodern theory, or even a range of discrete coherent theories. My approach to this study of social and cultural change is best described as a discourse in which a range of social theories are engaged in order to provide the best possible understanding of contemporary surfing in Australia, and the processes which create and are created by it. In this section I provide a brief outline of the main themes and controversies that form the basis of this discourse.

Lash (1994: 199) argues that the divide between Left and Right which dominated debates in social theory in the 60s and 70s has shifted to a division between a more cognitivist/scientistic approach on the one hand, and a culturalist or aesthetic/hermeneutic[5] approach on the other. Giddens (1994: 197) for example, dismisses the relevance of cultural postmodern phenomena (which he calls postmodern*ism*) in favour of what he declares to be the more interesting social 'institutional transitions' of postmodern*ity*. In contrast Lash (1994: 200) argues that the approach which Giddens takes leads to a neglect of the increasing proportion of

[5] A hermeneutic approach involves a holistic understanding of a situation or process; i.e. an adequate understanding of the part can only be achieved in relation to the whole and the whole in relation to its parts (Rorty 1979).

human interactions taking place outside social institutions. This division cannot be resolved simply by achieving a balance between rationalism and aesthetics, since the transitions which our social institutions are engaged in consist of an aestheticization which breaks down the boundaries that differentiate the social from the cultural. In dialectical terms, this can be described as a synthesis between the two.

> It no longer makes sense to ask in general, structural, terms whether culture is a moulder or a mirror of social processes because 'culture' has so pervaded 'society' that the distinction between the two is becoming obsolete (Crook et al. 1992: 75).

This aestheticization can be seen at work in all aspects of contemporary social and cultural change, from the rejection of metanarratives to debureaucratization and hypercommodification, the re-emergence of neo-fascism and other fundamentalisms, the proliferation of lifestyle groups, and the project of self assembly. Following Welsch (1997) and others (e.g. Maffesoli 1996, Lash 1994, Rorty 1979, Rojek 1995, Featherstone 1992) I have accepted it as fundamental to the postmodern condition and have employed it as a dominant theme throughout this study. Aestheticization therefore plays a pivotal role in the analysis of contemporary surfing culture, both at the macro level of subculture and economy and the micro level of self, risk-taking and group identity.

The different theoretical approaches which aim to explain the current upheaval in contemporary society can also be divided into *modern* (including neo-modern) and *postmodern* camps. Broadly speaking the distinction is that modernists emphasize continuity with the past while postmodernists emphasize discontinuity. However Kumar (1995: 178) warns against drawing a hard line between the two; "For many thinkers on both sides of the divide the difference is mainly one of emphasis, when it is not simply terminological". For example Giddens (1994: 197) declares that he prefers the terms 'late' or 'high' modernity rather than postmodernity, thus "...avoiding at least one of the 'posts' which otherwise tend to tramp across our pages ...". Bauman (1992: 187) says that postmodernity can be described as 'modernity conscious of its true nature' (see also Welsch 1997; Rojek 1995; Featherstone 1995). Harvey (1990) makes the point that early commentators of modernity like Baudelaire and Simmel recognized many of the fundamental characteristics attributed to postmodernity as inherent in modernity (see

also Bauman 1992; Welsch 1997). Berman (1992) on the other hand suggests that our ability to deal with the fragmentation and uncertainty described as indicative of postmodernity, is what makes us modern.

The waters are muddied further by the number of neo-modernist approaches which often differ only slightly from postmodernists, like the 'Late Capitalism' of Jameson (1991) and Lash & Urry (1994), the 'Reflexive Modernity' of Beck (1994), Giddens (1994) and Lash (1994), and Giddens' (1991, 1994) 'High Modernity'. In addressing these different approaches Kumar (1995: 137-148) points out that prominent theorists like Jameson and Lash, while rejecting the idea of a postmodern *society*, acknowledge postmodern *culture* as the 'dominant logic' of our time.

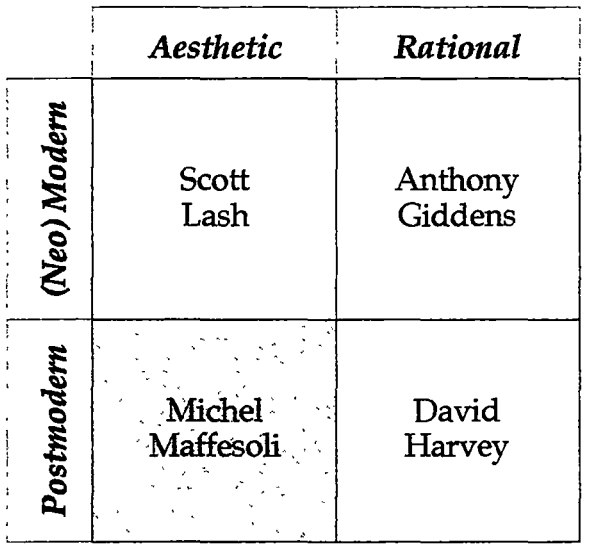


**Figure A: Locating this study in a typology of social and cultural change themes, as indicated by the darker shaded square.**

While commentators argue over whether we are entering a new era beyond modernity or whether we are simply in some late stage of modernity or for that matter whether we have ever really been modern at all (Latour 1993; Wynne 1996), most agree that we are in a time of significant cultural and social change. As imperfect as postmodernism might be, I agree with Jameson (1991: 418) when he concludes that despite its problems, no other theoretical framework provides the same insights into the current situation in quite so 'effective and economical' a fashion. Figure A (above) is an attempt to map the themes discussed in a typology. This is a very *un*postmodern thing to do since the boundaries I have drawn are typically blurred and the inhabitants of each category may well

argue that they don't belong. However, the aim of the exercise is not so much to categorize those inhabitants but to provide a guide as to where this thesis is located within the landscape of social and cultural change theory[6].

*Negotiating 'Post' and 'Other' Modernities*

Rojek (1995: 129) distinguishes between postmoder*nity* and postmoder*nism* by defining the former as a change in social conditions while the latter refers to a change in social consciousness; "... a sensibility born between the gradual collapse of one era and the slow, uneven crystallization of another". While I have adopted this definition of the terms rather than Giddens' (above), it is not always adequate. Sometimes this 'sensibility' is expressed as a belief that the dominant model of modernity always was inadequate and only distorted our vision of the 'truth' (Bauman 1992); other times it presents as an ideology, a belief that the world should become postmodern (Rorty 1979); other times it appears as a perspective which recognizes the current upheavals in society as part of an ongoing process of postmoder*nization* (Crook et al. 1992).

Postmodern approaches to the analysis of contemporary society range from the dystopian, such as Baudrillard's (1988b) vision of society as 'pure simulacra' - a world in which the influence of the mass media is such that we are all eternally lost in an unbreakable cycle of simulating simulations of things that no longer exist (see also MacCannell 1992; Crook et al. 1992; Friedman 1992) - to more utopian visions, like that of Anderson (1996) who argues that postmodernity has its own enlightenment project (see also Rorty 1979; Maffesoli 1996; Berking 1996). Not only do these approaches vary across a broad spectrum from the dystopian to the utopian - and very often as potentialities within the one account - but each can be 'outrageously eclectic', contradictory and circular; and unashamedly so (Kumar 1995: 103). As Maffesoli explains:

> [W]hen confronted with some sort of social renewal - a new society - it becomes important to put into practice a certain theoretical 'laxness' ... (Maffesoli 1996: 4).

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[6] The authors used in this typology are placed based on their general inclinations, however specific samples of work can be found that contradict these placements. The same ambiguity goes for this study as well, and by locating it with Maffesoli in the aesthetic/postmodern quarter I do not wish to indicate that I have adopted his approach as a guide, rather this study shares the same general orientation.

Many theorists resist defining just what the postmodern condition is. It is said that any effort to do so is inevitably modernist and fails to capture its essence (Kumar 1995; Rojek 1995).

> Once we remember that incoherence is the most distinctive among the attributes of postmodernity (arguably its defining feature), we need to reconcile ourselves to the prospect that all narratives will be to a varying extent flawed (Bauman 1992: xxiv).

Kumar (1995) points out that elements of traditional, modern and postmodern society are all present in contemporary society, and the defining features of postmodernity were recognized as inherent in modernity at the beginning of the last century by Simmel and Baudilaire. As Rojek (1995: 146) explains, it is logically impossible to provide a complete picture of postmodernity given its flexible, protean and emerging nature. It is also impractical and counterproductive to restrict the range of theorists which contribute to postmodern theory to those declared postmodernists, since very few have taken this step and most remain what Kumar (1995) describes as 'closet postmodernists'. Kumar (1995: 140) includes among these such prominent contributors to postmodern theory as Eric Jameson and Scott Lash. "There are in fact a good number of closet post-modernists. ... They are fellow-travellers of post-modernity, if not full party members".

Those with one foot out of the closet so-to-speak, like Zygmunt Bauman and Andreas Huyssen, generally deny that postmodernity represents a new era, rather they describe it as a point in the history of modernity where we are able to review the modernist project and reject some elements - in particular the teleological view of progress and history - and retain others. This approach to postmodernity is very close to that of Giddens' (1991) and Beck's (1992) neo-modernism. While rejecting the idea of postmodernity they claim that modernity has reached a point where reflexivity has become the dominant characteristic.

> [B]oth share the view that the long-standing patterns of development of modern societies have now thrown up such fundamental problems and dilemmas that they call into question any further movement along those lines. Modernity must now take stock of itself and become self-conscious about its future (Kumar 1995: 142).

For this study the most significant difference between this neo-modernist approach and postmodernism is that Giddens' (1991) and Beck's (1992)

idea of reflexivity is fundamentally rational and cognitive, while postmodernity emphasizes the aesthetic or hermeneutic nature of this reflexivity (Lash & Urry 1994; Beck et al. 1994)[7] As I explain in Chapter 4, the history of surfing culture in Australia is one of a victory of aestheticization over rational ordering. And when it comes to understanding voluntary leisure-time risk-taking, aesthetic reflexivity is far more consistent with the psychological dynamics involved than typically *post hoc* rationalizations for sensation-seeking behaviour.

Following the counsel of theorists like Bauman (1992), Maffesoli (1996) and Featherstone (1995), who advise that in this time of change we need to mobilise whatever explanatory tools provide insights, this study takes account of work from a range of relevant disciplines; including psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, social psychology, biology and other social and physical sciences. While this is not an exclusively postmodern method - Elias' (1978, 1986) figurational sociology[8] for example advocates the same approach, and Giddens (1991) and other neo-modernists employ it as well - it is demonstrative of the dedifferentiation of boundaries between specializations which postmodernists both recognize as inherently postmodern, and advocate.

> It is this more widely conceived transdisciplinary sociology which would seem to be best suited to attempt to answer the vital questions of our time ... (Featherstone 1995: 51).

Restricting a study of contemporary society to any one model or discipline is a bit like choosing one voice from many in the midst of a strange new 'cloud of unknowing', all predicting its size, shape, density, duration and trajectory. Instead I have engaged with as many voices as possible that

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[7] Giddens (1994) and Beck (1994) both state that their notion of reflexivity is not simply cognitive but inevitably entails aesthetic elements, while Lash (1994) acknowledges that reflexivity cannot be void of cognitive reason. However it is in the context of the sweeping aestheticization discussed earlier that the aesthetic quality of reflexivity deserves particular attention.

[8] Elias' concept of figurational sociology is based on the premise that the analytic distinctions we make can do damage to our understanding of the overall processes and influences involved in the dynamic and complex networks - or figurations - which constitute any society, such as those between social structures (like the economy and politics), between the individual's psychology and their biology, the individual and society, the micro and the macro. He advocates a shift in emphasis from analysis to synthesis and a more holistic approach to the study of society (Elias 1978; Dunning 1986; Mennell 1992). Although Eliasian sociologists like Jarvie & Maguire (1994: 211-229) declare postmodernism to be an unintelligible mess of contradictions, the similarities between the postmodern hermeneutic dedifferentiation of boundaries and figurational sociology are clear. While I draw on this figurational philosophy in my deliberations over methodology, I do not claim to be employing a distinctly figurational approach.

speak to the problems encountered in this study. This eclectic and pragmatic approach is entirely consistent with both postmodern and neo-modern methodologies. It involves allowing theoretical understandings to provide insights into one area of study without forcing other areas uncomfortably into the same framework. For example, Bauman's (1992) work on identity construction provided a valuable way of looking at commodification and group identity but his concept of transient and motile postmodern communities was inconsistent with my findings. In order to develop a model which represented the particular forms of sociation I found in surfing culture, I drew on the works of people like Max Weber, Helmuth Berking, Victor Turner, Michel Maffesoli, and Herman Schmalenbach; and I appropriated ideas from the literature on risk, sport and leisure, commodification and the mass media, and from a range of disciplines including psychology, geography, cultural studies, philosophy and semiotics (see Chapters 5 & 6). While there is nothing new about this process, the range of theoretical models and the range of academic disciplines which are brought to bear on the problem is typically postmodern.

The 'protean flexibility' of postmodernism allows the researcher to come to an understanding of the object of study in the process of constructing a theoretical framework. The end result is a cluster of theoretical elements brought together in order to address a specific problem, rather than employing a prefabricated and homogenous theoretical framework designed in advance to fit a clearly defined social structure (the similarity between postmodern and modern architecture is striking; see Harvey 1990; Jameson 1991; Caygill 1990). These elements are brought together as part of a *hermeneutic* approach which recognizes that they all bring something of value to a discourse, rather than an *epistemological* approach that would attempt to unite them in some theoretical matrix (Rorty 1979: 315-356). *The overarching postmodern framework established for this study is best understood as that discourse and not a theoretical structure that subsumes its various disparate elements.*

## Surfing & Postmodernity

Notwithstanding the above, a framework within which to conduct the discourse is necessary in order to achieve an understanding somewhat

more enlightening than a cacophony of voices in a fog. In this section I outline Crook et al.'s (1992) postmodernization framework, which provides a level of abstraction above the usual list of specific phenomena used to describe the postmodern condition[9]. This allows for an organizing structure without restricting creative discourse.

Many theorists emphasize the effects of postmodernization as if they were inevitable outcomes; so much so that they are sometimes presented as defining characteristics of postmodernity. By privileging common responses to the social and cultural upheaval of postmodernization in this way we ignore the indeterminate nature of postmodernity. Because cultural responses are no longer attached to social structures they cannot be defined in any universal sense in all but the most abstract of terms, and are unlikely to be homogenous but locally specific, even if superimposed by a global sign-economy. As Bauman (1992) says, the appropriate focus for sociological study in these conditions is at the micro level.

> The focus must now be on agency; more correctly on the *habitat* in which agency operates and which it produces in the course of operation (Bauman 1992: 190; see also Rorty 1979; Rojek 1995; Maffesoli 1996).

I suggest that Lyotard's (1991) definition of postmodernity as an 'incredulity towards metanarratives' is a good example of this universalization of a common but particular response. The rise of religious and other fundamentalisms is another recognized response to the discredited claims of the enlightenment (Crook et al. 1992). In postmodern(izing) societies this 'search for the real' can be interpreted as replacing modern metanarratives with postmodern alternatives.

Because the specific postmodern phenomena discussed above are contingent upon the local habitat, and because those that promote one approach ahead of another do so from within broader theoretical frameworks or orientations (neo-Marxist, cultural studies etc.), there is considerable debate surrounding them. As a result they provide another dimension to the typology presented in Figure A. This third dimension can be represented as a divide between those who see current trends generally leading to depthlessness, chaos and the end of social cohesion, and those who see it as an opportunity for freedom in self construction

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[9] E.g. depthless and fragmented selves, transient and fluid communities, superficiality, and a rejection of grand narratives.

and new creative forms of sociation. In reality this is not a clear divide but a continuum between more or less utopian and dystopian interpretations/visions of our current and future state. Like most attempts at categorizing theories and theorists in this postmodern habitat the following extension to the earlier social theory typology (Fig. A) is fundamentally flawed in that the boundaries cannot withstand rigorous scrutiny. For example, in regards to this third dimension alone, all of the authors I have engaged in this study have at least moments of pessimism and optimism in their work. Nevertheless the model has value as an exercise in situating this study in the broader context of the current theoretical landscape (see Figure B).

| | PESSIMISTIC | | OPTIMISTIC | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***Aesthetic*** | ***Rational*** | ***Aesthetic*** | ***Rational*** |
| ***(Neo) Modern*** | Eric Jameson | Jurgen Habermas | Scott Lash | Anthony Giddens |
| ***Postmodern*** | Jean Baudrillard | David Harvey | Michel Maffesoli | |

**Figure B: Locating this study in an extended typology of social theory. For simplicity's sake the third dimension of this typology is presented here in two dimensional form. Again the location of this study is indicated by the shaded square.**

While making their own observations and predictions as to the likely specific manifestations of postmodern change, Crook et al. (1992) also make a point of describing the processes involved at a more abstract and general level. Their postmodernization thesis is a synthesis of a wide range of theories and observations describing current social and cultural change. It provides a good framework through which to recognize the broader processes at work in society, enabling the researcher to study situated responses to these processes. This is far more satisfactory than declaring a society or phenomenon to be postmodern or not based on

whether it follows a predetermined response to more universal imperatives for change.

The postmodernization processes Crook et al. (1992) describe entail the natural extension of the modern capitalist imperatives of rationalization, differentiation and commodification to hyper mode and beyond. The 'beyond' is depicted as a reversal of these imperatives. The following summary is an oversimplification, but nevertheless it provides an adequate basis for further discussion in the main body of the thesis:

i) The instrumental rationalization that Max Weber recognized as a driving force of modernization is seen to fail in its promise of enlightenment at the same time it appears to have infiltrated every sphere of life. A disenchantment with scientific and other instrumental rationalisms is manifest in an aestheticization of everyday life which gives value to the sensual and recognizes the relative nature of truth;

ii) similarly, the differentiation and specialization which Emile Durkheim saw as characterizing the modernization of society, reaches its logical limits where it no longer delivers the efficiencies or understandings it promised. The boundaries constructed in the pursuit of these rationalizations fragment, and dedifferentiation occurs. The process of aestheticization results in a more hermeneutic or holistic cultural ethos;

iii) the expansion of the capitalist economic system, which Karl Marx described, has resulted in the invasion of our lifeworlds (Habermas 1987) to the point where everything has an exchange value. This hypercommodification becomes so pervasive that the distinction between commodified and uncommodified space loses its meaning in what 'looks like' decommodification.

Following Crook et al.'s (1992) model, the surfing subculture exists 'beyond' modernity in all three areas (above):

i) the surfboard riding subculture emerged in the early 1960s in opposition to the rational ordering of the beaches by the modern institution of surf lifesaving and the local councils, and has continued to privilege the sensual experience; a process of aestheticization;

ii) the surfing habitat is one in which the distinction between modern categories such as sport and art, nature and culture, work and leisure are broken down; a process of dedifferentiation;

iii) almost every aspect of the culture is commodified, from its functional goods to its symbolic tokens and meanings. The image of surfing is sold through its fashion and through its appropriation as a marketing tool for mainstream goods as varied as soft drinks and prestige cars; a process of hypercommodification.

I have also incorporated a number of other analytic models within the overarching postmodern framework, some of which are more apposite to a modern habitat, such as sportization, bureaucratization and subcultures. But as Rojek (1995: 146) points out, this apparently incongruous mix of postmodern and modern analytic constructs is inevitable in any study of leisure in postmodernity, and in this thesis I believe it facilitates a sharper focus on both the postmodern theory and the surfing subculture. As Hassan (1985) says, there is no 'iron curtain' that divides the modern from postmodern period. Since all 'periods' are hybrids to some extent, the key to understanding them lies in recognizing the continuity and discontinuity between them and the emergent and residual elements.

Surfing re-emerged in Hawaii at the beginning of the 20th Century as a proto-postmodern phenomenon (see Chapter 4). Drawing on traditional culture and driven by an aesthetic sensibility it has exemplified the dialectical struggle between the aesthetic and rational imperatives discussed in the following subsection. An important element in this study is the distinction I make between the surfing subculture as a predominantly postmodern phenomenon and the dominant (parent) culture as a culture in the process of postmodernization. While this distinction may appear simplistic, it serves to expose the complexity of the dialectical relationship between the two.

As stated above, it is not my intention to enter into debates over the validity of postmodern theories at a metatheoretical level, rather I intend to discuss the theories in the middle range, where they relate to the way in which individuals are experiencing life in this period of upheaval. Here I agree with Kumar (1995: 195) when he says that whether the contemporary world is postmodern or not, postmodern theory provides

an important way of thinking about it. One important perspective is the recognition that postmodernization is a dialectical process (Crook et al. 1992).

*The Dialectics of Postmodernization*

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the postmodern process of aestheticization can be interpreted as producing a synthesis between aesthetic and rational orientations. This is significant in that it indicates a break from the ideal type modernist dichotomy where aesthetic or cultural knowledge was differentiated from instrumental rationality and cognitive knowledge. In the same way phenomena were categorized as rightfully subject to one or the other and conflicts emerged over contested ground. For example, Rojek (1995: 36) notes that debates over leisure in modernity tended to emphasize two sets of contrasting but interdependent forces; 1) 'order and control' - epitomized by Weber's work on rationalization and bureaucracy; and 2) 'disorder and fragmentation' - emphasized by Baudelaire, Nietzsche and Simmel.

Kumar (1995: 85) describes this as a dialectical relationship between the 'social and political project' and the 'aesthetic concept'; between bourgeois moder*nity*, represented in the rationality of 'science, reason, progress, industrialism', and cultural moder*nism*, which was a reaction against the bourgeois form in favour of 'sentiment, intuition and the free play of imagination' - most evident in the European Romanticism of the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries. Harvey (1990: 11) points out that modern life was "... suffused with the sense of the fleeting, the ephemeral, the fragmentary, and the contingent ...", and it was the modern enlightenment project which sought to bring order and liberation to humanity through the scientific domination of nature and the development of rational forms of social organization and rational modes of thought. Moder*nism* did not stem so much from a desire for disorder and a halt to modern progress so much as a reaction against the oppression which that order entailed; i.e. Weber's 'iron cage' and demystification of the world inherent in modern rationalization.

Following Kumar and Harvey we can see that the propensity towards modern dichotomies belonged to the ordering and rationalizing project of moder*nity*, while the reaction embodied in cultural moder*nism* constituted

a dialectical process between the two contradictory imperatives of modernization. As has been noted, Welsch (1997: 38) says that we began our journey into postmodernity with Nietzsche, and both Simmel and Baudelaire are considered to be at least proto-postmodernists (Rojek 1995; Kumar 1995). Bauman (1992: 31) in fact claims that Simmel was " ... the sole 'postmodern' thinker among the founding fathers of sociology". Postmodernity then can be seen as an advanced stage of the dialectical process of postmodernization inherent in modern society from the outset. While the ideal typical postmodern phenomena could be described as the product of a synthesis between aesthetic and rational imperatives, the idea of postmodernity as a stable end state is antithetical. Bauman (1992: 190) for example speaks of the same dialectic at play in postmodernity between 'randomness and pattern', and between 'freedom and dependence'. Any notion of postmodern synthesis then needs to be free from connotations of inherent harmony and equilibrium.

By taking another look at the postmodern mode of aestheticization we can see how this dialectical process, which has been evident in societies since ancient times[10], is manifest in postmodernity. Rather than another cyclical resurgence of modern aestheticization, this postmodern mode cannot be equated with the cultural Romanticism or the avant-garde (Campbell 1987; Kumar 1995), and is described as generating a 'postcultural' phenomenon:

> It lacks clearly demarcated regions, its boundaries with economy, polity and society are blurred, its hierarchies are multiple and constantly shifting, and it registers no 'depth', no distinction between surface and reality (Crook et al. 1992: 75)

Clearly the hypercommodification which Crook et al. (1992) single out as one of the main features of postmodernization is a key factor in the breadth of the current aestheticization. Through marketing, advertising and the infiltration of the economy into every aspect of our daily lives, the economy has become integral to who we perceive ourselves to be, the way we think, and the way we behave:

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[10] The struggle between Apollo and Dionysius in Greek mythology exemplifies this dialectic: "Apollo stands for the principles of formalism, rationalism, and consistency while Dionysius stands for the realities of ecstasy, fantasy, excess and sensuality" (Turner 1996: 19). Following Nietzsche the struggle between Apollo and Dionysius has been a regular theme in discussions of this central dialectical struggle (e.g. Harvey 1989; Maffesoli 1996; Rojek 1995; Turner 1996; Katz 1988).

> Consumption for adornment, expression and group solidarity become not merely the means to a lifestyle, but the enactment of lifestyle (Shields 1992b: 16).

Welsch (1997: 24-38) argues that behind this surface aestheticization is an *epistemological aestheticization* which affects the 'foundational structures of reality'. He says that postmodernity has its roots in Kant who declared the aesthetic to be the basis of all knowledge; a 'principal protoaesthetic of cognition'. Neitzsche took this further and showed that our representations of reality are 'wholly aesthetic'. The main point being that the process of turning sensory stimuli into concepts is inevitably an act of human creativity. Welsch (1997: 21) says that the aesthetic constitution of reality is now the widely accepted view of "... all theoreticians reflecting on reality and science in this century".

> [T]he new fundamentality and universality of the aesthetic is the consequence of an epistemological aestheticization. In the course of this the aesthetic has pushed its way into the core of knowledge and truth. It is as a consequence of this process that recent thinking has assumed basic aesthetic features (Welsch 1997: 38).

This 'aestheticization of consciousness' means that reality is experienced as art; "... a constitution of having been produced, being changeable, unobling, fluctuating etc." (Welsch 1996: 7). A relativism now pervades the postmodern consciousness, and social structures - including authorities and hierarchies - are recognized as contingent; in Marx's words 'all that is solid melts into air'.

Set free from social structures, agents are forced to choose incessantly. This aesthetic reflexivity does not operate as an anti-rational process, rather it involves engaging with competing inclinations towards things like spontaneity and order, or individual freedom and group dependence. In this way the dialectical challenge which cultural modernism presented to the institutionally situated dichotomies of modernity is now manifest daily in the choices of postmodern individuals, through the aestheticization of everyday life. As Bauman (1992: 191) describes it, the habitat in which agents operate provides the 'inventory of ends and pool of means' from which these choices are made. But, he insists, this 'archive of styles', as Crook et al. (1992) call it, does not operate on the basis of obligation but by seduction.

## Theoretical Overview

While adopting an overarching postmodern framework for this study I have not undertaken a methodology which might deny the existence of modern or even traditional elements in surfing. Rather I have approached the study with the intention of exploring and explaining just how this apparently postmodern culture operates within the broader postmodernizing environment in which it is situated. The intention is to provide data for the ongoing discussion of contemporary social and cultural change.

The dialectic between aestheticization and an instrumentally rational orientation informs the study of surfing's history and the relationship between the contemporary subculture and mainstream society. Aestheticization is also found to be key to the risk orientation of the subculture in that it sanctions and makes more accessible the ecstatic thrill of self transcendence which is the main motivating aim of risk-taking behaviour. An appreciation of the sublime in nature is seen to provide a foundation for an experience of the self and sociality quite distinct from the norm in modernity. This is not to say that such experiences and social formations did not occur in the modern era - clearly they did - but the experience would rarely form the foundation of an individual's sense of self, and the social configurations which emerged out of the shared experience typically followed the trajectory from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* - from community to association (Weber 1968). The fact that the ecstatic experience remains the focus of surfing subculture is a product of the primacy of an aesthetic orientation above the rational.

The same orientation is evident even in the typically hyperrational spheres of industry and competitive sport. Instead of subsuming the surfing subculture within mainstream economic and social life, the commodification of every aspect of the subculture, and the related development of surfing as a competitive sport, has managed to occur to a significant degree without losing touch with the foundational surfing aesthetic. Through its interaction with the mainstream the essentially postmodern subculture is seen to operate as a postmodernizing influence on its parent culture.

The surfing culture in Australia, from its historical beginnings through to current manifestations typifies a kind of 'reactionary' or 'oppositional' postmodernism (Kumar 1995; Lash 1990). The nature of this opposition follows Crook et al.'s (1992) model of postmodernization. The most obvious characteristic is the rejection of modern rational ordering of everyday life in favour of an aestheticized lifestyle which revolves around a communion with nature and neo-tribal forms of sociation (Maffesoli 1996). Even the industry and sporting competition sectors function to a significant extent to support and nurture the subculture's oppositional forms.

Baudelaire (1964) described modernity in terms of a tension between 'the fleeting and the ephemeral' on the one hand and 'the eternal and immutable' on the other. For many commentators, the postmodern condition is characterized by the latter's victory over the former. For example, Harvey says that the most startling thing about postmodernity is a total acceptance of the fleeting and ephemeral side of modernity:

> It does not try to transcend it, counteract it, or even to define the 'eternal and immutable' elements that might lie within it. Postmodernism swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is (Harvey 1990: 44).

In this study I attempt describe and explain the forms of stability and continuity I found in surfing culture rather than ignore them as Harvey implies postmodernism tends to do.

# CHAPTER 3
## AN UNORTHODOX ETHNOGRAPHY

> *If we enter to some degree into the lives of the people we study, take part in their daily round of activity and observe the scenes and the sites where it occurs; if we talk with them both informally and in relatively organized interviews; if we inspect organization records, official documents, public media, letters, diaries, and any other records and artefacts we can find; if we record systematically all the information we acquire in these ways; and if, finally, we assess that information systematically to see what evidence it provides for what conclusions - if we do all that, should people take our conclusions to be highly credible? (Becker 1970: 39)*

The research design takes into account the need for ethnographic study to inform current theories of social and cultural change. It also aims to overcome the shortcomings inherent in narrowly focussed studies by conducting the research at strategic locations around Australia. Figurational methodology influenced this hermeneutic study, in that current trends are examined in their historical context, and the relationships between micro and macro processes are analysed. In so doing the research provides for enough breadth and depth to allow for an informed discussion of the surfing subculture on a national basis.

The breadth of the study aims to identify rather than quantify the diversity of the culture. The research design has been informed by the literature covering social and cultural change, sport and leisure, and surfing; as well as my own experience as an 'insider'. The study focuses on a number of key sectors in the subculture (industry, bureaucracy, and competition) and relates these to other aspects, including individual and group identity, internal conflicts, lifestyles, relationships with mainstream society, and the surfing experience itself. The work was carried out at a range of locations across the country, including urban, country and remote areas.

The research methods include literature reviews, intensive interviews, participant observation, a questionnaire, and analysis of surfing literature, videos, promotional material, and other documentation.

## Methodology

The degree to which the surfing subculture supports the various approaches to postmodern theory is a central theme of the research. Drawing on my past experience and the literature on surfing as a knowledge base, I took into account the thoughts of a number of theorists in my deliberations over the most appropriate methodology for the study. What follows in this section is a brief review of the ideas which informed those deliberations.

MacCannell (1992: 9) claims, that any study of new cultural phenomena must begin and end ethnographically, otherwise "... it is condemned to produce, or fail to produce, only that which the investigator already knew". He says that postmodern cultural forms are susceptible to ethnographic research, but that these studies will not necessarily uncover the depthlessness and centrelessness that postmodern theory predicts.

> It will potentially give us, for example, fine-grained descriptions of actual instances of 'historical rupture,' the real conditions of existence of 'fragmented subjects,' actual expressions of the valorization of surfaces,' and concrete examples of the 'simulacrum' or simulation of authenticity. But it will not necessarily yield the absence of a center, or subject, or subjectivity ... (MacCannell 1992: 289).

Friedman (1992) argues that there has been a decline in the authority of ethnography due to the fragmentation of hegemonic structures, and he claims that a retreat from objectivism and theory to the exclusive contemplation of field work is a symptom of the current period of transformation. Alternatively, it can be argued that as a 'symptom' of social change it is also an appropriate systemic response. Bauman appears to support this approach:

> I suggest that postmodern sociology can be best understood as a mimetic representation of the postmodern condition. But it can also be seen as a pragmatic response to this condition (Bauman 1992: 42).

Although not available at the time of designing the research, Maffesoli (1996) also supports the argument, describing the retreat from theory as necessary when faced with a 'new society'. He wants to avoid 'disembodied ratiocinations' when exploring 'concrete existence' while still being able to 'venture into deeper waters'. The aim of this synergy is "... a vagabond sociology which at the same time is not deprived of its object" (Maffesoli 1996: 3).

Friedman (1992: 133) does not discount ethnography as an appropriate method for the study of contemporary social change, but he does suggest that anthropology is in need of self-reflection if it is to "... lead us to a broader perspective". Bauman (1992) also proposes new strategies for the study of society in the postmodern context. He suggests that the chaotic nature of postmodernity results in quantitative research no longer being of value. Such an approach would involve an assessment of the surfing subculture and its population as 'rootless', 'motile' and 'transitory', but the initial evidence suggested more substantive, although flexible, social configurations. At the same time this relative substantiality did not appear to be linked to the kind of structures which brought order in modernity, and Bauman's approach does take account of this.

> The focus must now be on agency; more correctly, on the habitat in which agency operates and which it produces in the course of operation (Bauman 1992: 190-1).

Marcus (1992), like Bauman, says that tradition, communities, kinship, rituals and power structures are no longer the guiding tropes which organize ethnography. He says that ethnography now focuses on how collective and individual identities are negotiated and how diversity emerges in the new transcultural world.

While coming from a variety of perspectives, the points made above all had something to offer the research design. My experience and the literature on surfing led me to believe that it was a highly individualistic pursuit with a cultural identity which was the product of multiple influences from the local to the global. The social configurations were diverse but they appeared to be far more stable than postmodern theory suggested and so an openness was called for in the design, in the methodology, and in the attitude with which the research project was undertaken. Ethnography provided a means of focusing on the bodily experience and the dynamics of individual and group identity while still recognizing structural elements of the subculture and the processes of social change as they were manifest in it.

A retreat from theory is not a necessary component of ethnography and the aims of this project were substantially theoretical. But rather than adopting a rigid theoretical framework through which to approach the subject, the openness described allowed for a certain creativity (which

Maffesoli (1996) has supported *post hoc*). This openness was also manifest in the research design with the inclusion of a quantitative survey.

## Research Design

In evaluating the above approaches against my experience and the literature on surfing, I chose to adapt a model which Sayer (1992) recommends. This model entails a synergy of abstract theoretical research, intensive concrete research, and extensive generalization research. Not only does it allow for openness and flexibility in the intensive research, but it provides for regularities and patterns to be detected in the extensive research, and for the kind of theoretical creativity required of sociology at a time of significant social change.

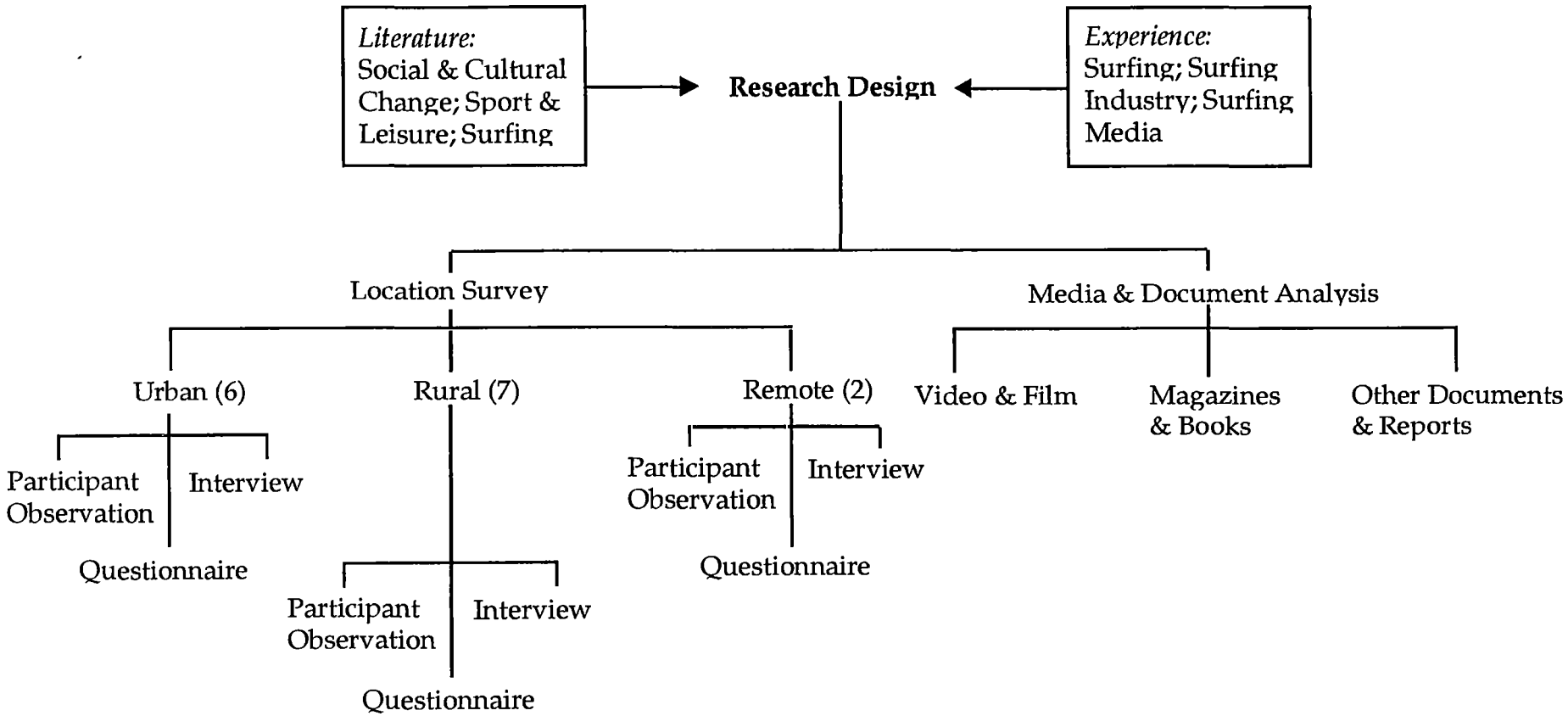
The abstract theoretical component involved a critique *of* and a contribution *to* postmodern approaches to social and cultural change. The intensive research involved participant observation and intensive interviews. These components overlapped somewhat with the extensive research in that both these intensive techniques were carried out at a variety of locations around Australia. The extensive research also included a formal questionnaire, covering demographic, attitudinal and behavioral questions, administered by me at sites around the country (see Fig. C). This holistic design provided the means whereby I could 'grasp the rope from both ends' as Maffesoli prescribes:

> ...on the one end an existential ontology; on the other, the simplest of trivialities, the first shining a laser light on the diverse manifestations of the second (Maffesoli 1996: 2).

### *Observer Status*

As indicated, I did not come to this study as a naive observer, and my experience of surfing culture has influenced both the design of the research and the manner in which it was conducted. My approach to the research was to adopt what Babbie (1989: 264-6) describes as the role of 'participant-as-observer' whereby I participated fully as a surfer while making it clear to those who played a substantial part as subjects in the study that I was undertaking research into the surfing subculture. As Becker (1970) points out, in assessing the value of evidence produced in

***Figure C*** ***An Unorthodox Ethnography***



participant observation, we need to take into account the observer's role in the group. Marcus (1992) goes further, stipulating that not only do we need to take account of the relationship between the observer and the observed, but also the relationship between the two worlds they belong to. In light of these insights it is appropriate that I give a brief historical account of my surfing experience in order that the reader might judge the value of the work which follows.

I started learning to surf at about age five in the early 1960s. By the time I was 16 surfing had become an all consuming passion and I was immersed in the counter culture surfing scene of the early 1970s. I dropped out of school at 17 and spent the next three years as an itinerant surfer taking on casual work and travelling around the south and east coast of Australia in a constant quest for surfing adventures. I returned to Tasmania and began working full-time in 1977. My work allowed me to take time off when the surf was good and I visited mainland Australia and overseas for surfing trips on annual leave. By the time I was 30, competing commitments from career, study, and family, had seen me withdraw from the surfing 'scene'. I continue to surf however, whenever the swell is good, although I no longer spend much time travelling in search of the best waves.

Another significant connection I have with the surfing subculture is through my brother's surfboard manufacturing business. It is a small business where he makes handcrafted surfboards for the local market as well as supplying some customers in other States and overseas. He also operates a small surf shop at his factory. I have been his 'honorary' marketing and promotions manager for the past 15 years. This has given me considerable insights into the surfing culture industry (including the surfing media), as well as valuable contacts for the purposes of this research project.

As Douglas (1976) points out, the researcher must have some level of understanding of the object of investigation before it can be determined which are the most appropriate research methods. From experience I knew that while there were common elements of the culture which could be found in any localized social configuration, I was also aware of considerable cultural differences between these configurations, and any

study of surfing culture in Australia would need to take account of these differences in order to avoid the mistake of over-extending inferences drawn from a limited case study (Sayer 1992). Although these differences were not necessarily tied to geographic locations, the most appropriate means of accounting for them was to conduct research into a range of different facets of the culture at a range of surfing locations across the country so as to ensure exposure to the broadest possible cross section of the subculture's manifestations.

*Location Survey*

The location survey involved staying at fifteen *general locations* (see fig. D) for between one to eight weeks - where possible camping at a *specific surfing site* - and travelling to different surfing sites in each area.

The choice of locations and sites was made on the basis of my past experience, information from surfing media, consultation with other surfers both prior to embarking on the fieldwork and in the process of undertaking the fieldwork. Some of these locations and sites were chosen because they provided exposure to specific aspects of the culture (see fig. D). North Narrabeen, for example, is well known for its club oriented culture and focus on competitive surfing; Cactus is a desert location where surfers who moved there in the 1970s have maintained a lifestyle in opposition to the commodification and sportization of the culture; Torquay is a major industry centre and I timed my stay there to coincide with a major professional competition at Bells Beach. Other locations were chosen to ensure a reasonable geographic distribution across the country and adequate sampling across the categories of urban, country and remote area locations.

The broad scale of this research is an unorthodox ethnographic approach in that it does not focus on one particular localized community. I have justified this unorthodoxy in order to take account of the subculture's varied manifestations of global and local influences. My status as an insider allowed me to do this because gaining access to the subculture at each new location could be achieved very quickly. I came to the project with an extensive knowledge of the culture as it is manifest across the

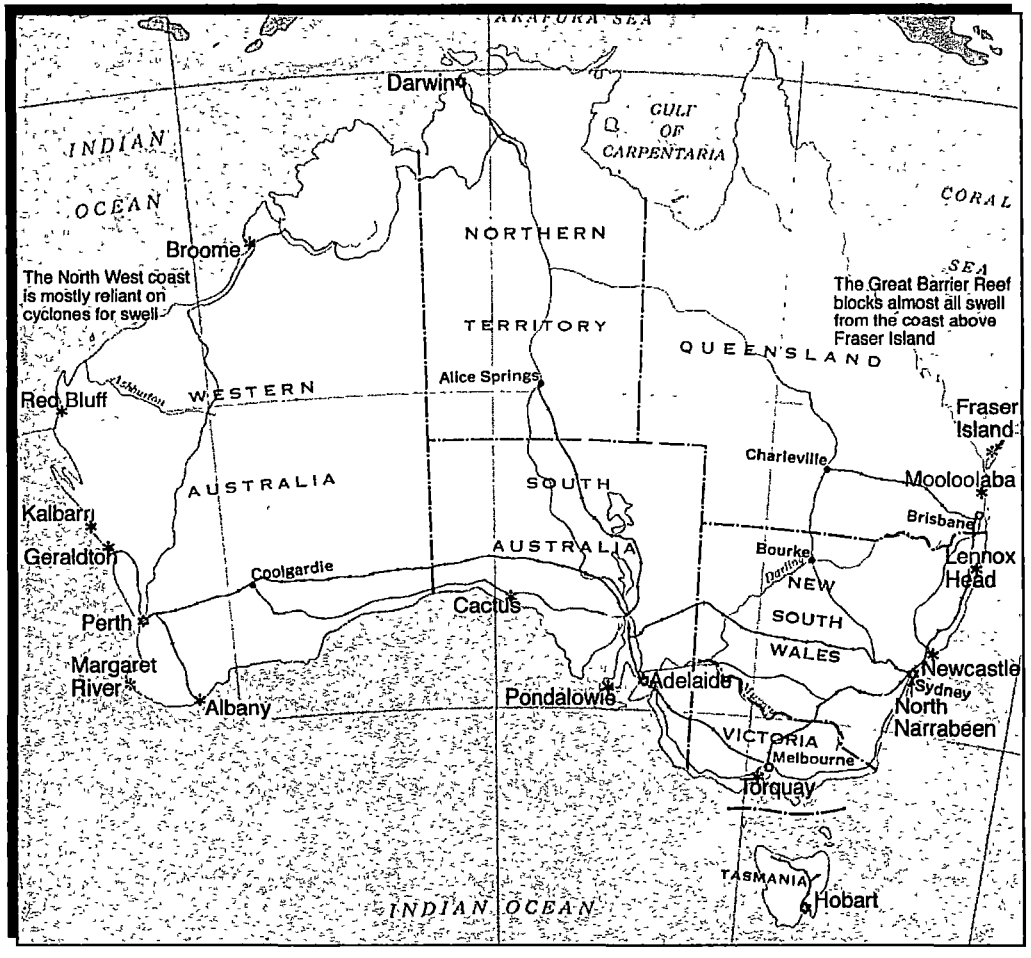



**Figure D**

**Research Locations**

AUSTRALIA

- International Bdy
- State Bdy
- Research Location
- State Capitol City
- Railroads
- Roads

Miles 0 200 400 600

Kilometers 0 200 400 600

* While Broome (Rural), Fraser Island (Remote), and Newcastle (Urban) were visited as part of the fieldwork they have not been accounted for elsewhere because of the lack of data collected. The time spent at these locations was less than a week each due to the lack of surf and the unlikelihood of improvement in the short-term.

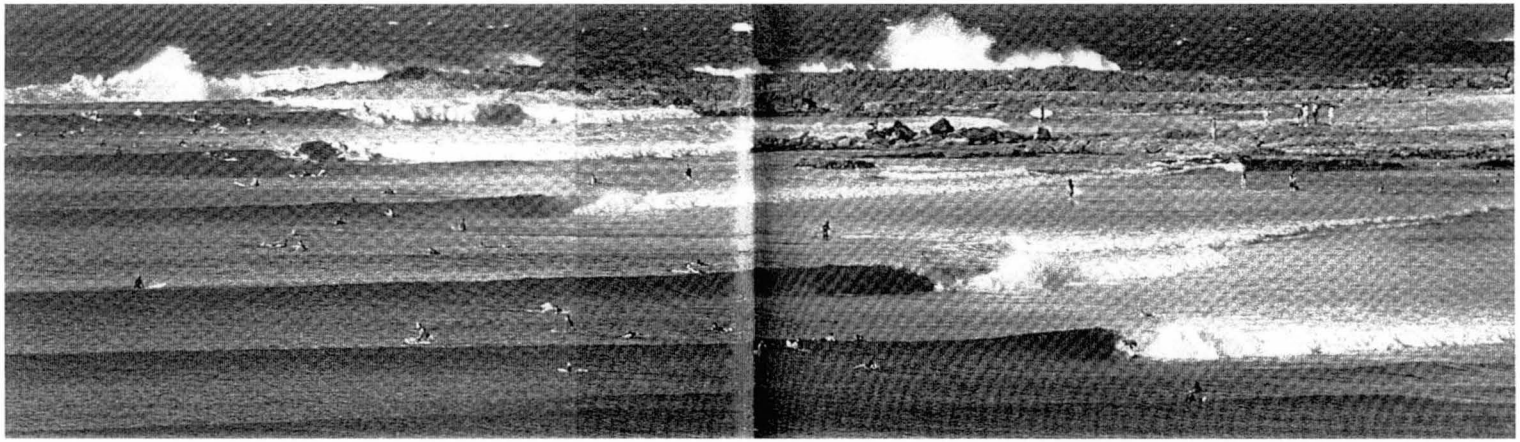
**Figure E: Characteristics of Locations by Location Type***

| Location Type | Characteristics | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Counter Culture | Athletic Culture | Manufactur-ers (Clothing & Accessories) | Manufactur-ers (Surfboards) | Cool Climate | Warm Climate | High Risk Sites | Novice Sites | Body -boarding Sites | Long -boarding Sites | Dense Surfing Population | Moderately Dense Surfing Population | Sparse Surfing Population |
| N=6 Urban | 3 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| N=7 Country | 4 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 1 | 1 | - | 3 | 3 |
| N=2 Remote | 2 | - | - | 2 | - | 2 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | 2 |
| **Total** | **9** | **7** | **6** | **13** | **5** | **10** | **11** | **12** | **4** | **2** | **4** | **5** | **6** |

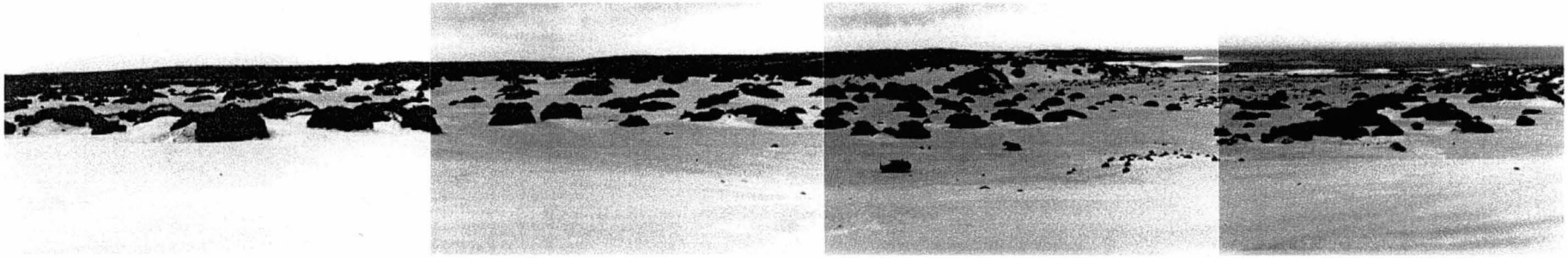
**Note:**
- The total number of locations is 15 (with multiple sites attached to each location).
- Each location may have any number of the above characteristics within its area.
- Population density relates to the location and not any particular site.
- Longboard and bodyboard sites are specified because they represent significant niches on the margin of the dominant (shortboard) surfing culture.

* See Appendix 1 for details on locations, and Appendix 3 for an explanation of the categories.

**Plate 1**



Urban beach, Queensland's Gold Coast (Carroll 1999)*



Cactus; a remote surfing location in South Australia. The vehicle in the second shot from the right provides perspective. A view from the headland in the top of this shot, back across the surfbreak, can be seen in plate 5.

* Unless indicated otherwise, all photographs presented in this thesis were taken in the course of the fieldwork.

country and so I was able to recognize significant issues and aspects, and choose representative locations and key people without first having to 'infiltrate' as a total outsider. This head start meant that I was able to undertake a national study within the 12 month time frame I had allotted for fieldwork, while still achieving the depth of understanding which gives ethnographic studies their value and authority.

*Multiple Facets*

It is important to note that the surfing culture which exists in any location is not the result of an homogenous assimilation of influences. Nor is it simply an heterogeneous configuration of competing localized influences. It is also effected by the individual constituents' interactions with the broader subculture; through the surfing media, travel or interactions with other travelling surfers, or through an inside association with particular globalizing subgroups like competitive surfing, industry, or the media. As Marcus points out:

> Cultural difference or diversity arises here not from some local struggle for identity, but as a function of a complex process among all the sites in which the identity of someone or group anywhere is defined in simultaneity (Marcus 1992: 316).

Clearly these influences do not stop at any boundary between the surfing subculture and 'the outside', but for research purposes boundaries must be drawn. Influences from the wider society are addressed in the realm of theory.

There are many facets of the subculture which play an important role in the dynamics of local manifestations. Some of these are more prominent and thus easier to study than others. The surfing culture industry, sportization, and the surfing media, are the more structural elements, while bodily experience, the surfing aesthetic, and individual and group identity are the more agency oriented facets chosen for the purpose of this study. They were chosen on the basis of my experience and the literature on surfing and social change. Wherever possible these facets were addressed at each location, through participant observation, intensive interviews, the questionnaire, and various public texts and other documentation.

There is a bias in the research towards the 'core' surfing population rather than those on the margins of the subculture; like neophytes and those who

'have a go' at surfing now and then through the summer months. It is not that the latter groups have not been addressed, but since they are less likely to be at the beach (especially the more dangerous sites), they are less likely to be picked up as part of the study. This bias is entirely appropriate given the focus of the thesis, however it is worth noting since the total population of those who surf, including this under represented group, is estimated at 2.16 million (*Surfing Australia Inc.* 1996: 5), significantly greater than the core surfing population of approximately 80, 000 (see Chapter 4).

*Getting In*

Unlike conventional ethnographic studies, this project required me to re-establish myself at each new site. I did this in a number of ways. I would first establish my credentials as a journeyman surfer by going surfing and striking up conversations with surfers in the area. In some locations, like Red Bluff, where the surfing population was relatively small and concentrated in one camp and mostly one surfing site, my status as a researcher and a surfer became well known fairly quickly. In other locations, like Margaret River, where there were very large surfing populations spread over a large area with multiple surfing sites, other symbols of insider status helped establish my identity as a surfer. These symbolic tokens included clothing, language, surfboards on the car, the large commercial size logos of my brother's surfboards on the doors of the car, behaviours like early morning surf checks, and conversation which demonstrated insider knowledge.

In locations like Margaret River I was able to participate as an 'unobserved observer' by simply going surfing and 'hanging out'. In locations like Red Bluff my researcher status soon became well known, and I found that people approached me to ask what the research was all about. In locations where my status as a surfer/researcher was well known, the dual identities seemed to be seen as separate, and I believe that it was because of this apparent separation of the roles that the identity of researcher was accepted. The most important factor in this was the priority I gave to surfing; each day I would go surfing first and be seen to do my research between surfs. If I was carrying my clipboard (for the questionnaire) or tape recorder (for intensive interviews) I was doing research, if not I was simply a surfer with an interesting/strange job.

Although I was open about the fact that I was always really on the job, my *full* participation as a surfer appeared to neutralize this. It neutralized it because my participation was not a front and my behaviour as a surfer was not modified to suit the research in any apparent way.

Rock (1979) states that there is an underlying disengagement in participant observation which makes the 'visible preoccupations' hollow, and that the participation lacks the emotional involvement normally associated with the activity. This was not the case for me. When I paddled out for a surf I did not sit on my board and observe; I chased waves with the same passion as everybody else and engaged in competition for waves. A surfing session usually involves periods of sitting and waiting. During these times I only engaged in the usual banter about the surf; but I also observed, listened, engaged in analysis and made mental notes, switching from surfer to researcher depending on the requirements of full participation in the surfing session.

To some degree I presented a front as a surfer. I did not allow myself to be seen taking field notes (they were always taken in my tent or in the car), maintaining the appearance of a separation of the role of observer and participant. This was not done as a deliberate deception (although I concede that it may have functioned in this way to some degree) but so as not to impede the natural flow of everyday life I was observing.

I also approached local surf shops taking on a role marketing my brother's surfboards. I did not present myself as a professional 'sales rep', just one brother doing another a favour while I was in town - which was in fact the case - except that establishing credentials and gaining access to information was the primary aim of the contact. The cost and inconvenience of having boards shipped from Tasmania when they could always be purchased cheaper locally usually led to the manager declining the offer, and because I wasn't a pushy salesperson amicable conversation inevitably followed. Having established my credentials as an industry insider and dispensed with the business of surfboards I would broach the subject of my research.

Surf shops (as opposed to surf boutiques - see Chapter 7) are invariably managed by surfers, and usually surfers well established in the area.

These people were valuable informants and supplied me with information about where to go surfing, who the key people in the area were, local surfing politics, upcoming events, the surfers' hang-outs etc., and industry matters relating to the research. The business interactions and the exposure to the role which the shops played in the local culture were also rich sources of information. This extra layer of insider status was useful in gaining access to otherwise busy people likely to be dismissive or even suspicious of anybody doing research - surfer or not.

My position within the industry was transparent and unthreatening. My brother's business, like most surfboard manufacturers, is a small concern. He doesn't make clothing or other accessories which would put him in competition with the large companies, and while surfboards are an important item for the 'hardcore' credibility of any surf shop they are not that profitable for the retailers. Small surfboard manufacturers are on the margins of the industry economically speaking, outside the more cut throat, big money arena of the surf fashion companies. At the same time these large companies are dependent upon their association with the activity of surfing for their success, and so surfboard manufacturers have a significant symbolic position in the industry, yet remain relatively powerless.

The marketing role also helped with the rank and file surfers as the surfboards had been advertised quite widely in surfing magazines and my car bore the logo on the doors in the manner of a commercial vehicle. For the serious surfer, surfboards are works of art - aesthetic items in their own right - and surfboard 'shapers' have a fairly high status within the subculture. This was an important benefit as any surfer visiting an area is subject to considerable scrutiny by the locals; my association with the product provided me with credibility even before going surfing, and at a level beyond that which my average skill as a surfer could demand.

### Participant Observation

Lofland and Lofland define participant observation as,

> ... a process in which an investigator establishes and sustains a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship with a human association in its natural setting for the purpose of developing a scientific understanding of that association (Lofland & Lofland 1984: 12).

They describe the process as always involving an "... interweaving of looking and listening" (Lofland & Lofland 1984: 13). Rock (1979: 183) prescribes a more interactive role for the investigator claiming that the only way to gain knowledge is by immediate experience: "Knowledge inheres in doing or being, it is a quality of the knowing-known transaction". Sayer (1992) says that the strength of this kind of intensive research lies in its ability to uncover causal relations, while its weakness lies in a limited capacity to generalize from these findings beyond the boundaries of the study. By taking into consideration my long association with the subculture the 'long-term relationship' and the 'doing or being' become unproblematic requirements. And the broad scale of the field work extends the study's analytic reach to a national level; adding breadth to the depth inherent in the method.

*Expert Incompetence*

Rock says that an ineptness or artlessness may be a necessary part of participant observation:

> Participant observation must rest on an overt recognition of initial incompetence. The process of acquiring competence is itself the end of research (Rock 1979: 199).

There are two main reasons for this approach; firstly, the researcher should come to the object of study with an openness that allows an awareness of things taken for granted by insiders; and secondly, taking a role of the 'socially acceptable incompetent' facilitates a steady flow of information as insiders readily take on the complementary role of expert informants (Lofland & Lofland 1984: 38).

At first glance it may appear that the role of the inept outsider was not available to me. It is possible that I could have made use of my insider knowledge while playing the role of an inept outsider for the purposes of the research, but - aside from the ethical considerations - I am convinced that I would have lost far more than I gained by this approach. While I would no doubt have had access to key bureaucratic figures and some academically inclined surfers, I would have been treated with suspicion by the rank and file - especially the young - and industry insiders. As Lofland & Lofland (1984) point out, sometimes the researcher needs a special bond and 'expertise' in order to build intimate relations. This expertise also helps prevent the researcher being fobbed off, or supplied false or misleading information.

There was however a sense in which I was inept. I was an experienced surfer, and to that extent an expert insider, but I was a surfer with a job collecting data on surfing in order to fill some gaps in the knowledge of surfing, and I was asking my fellow surfers to help fill those gaps. It was from this position that I approached other surfers. When appropriate I would explain that my questions might seem naive but that I needed to ask them in order to do the job of research properly. This combination of insider expertise and acceptable incompetence worked extremely well. The surfers were participating in a process, through me (a trusted insider), aimed at informing a shared incompetence. They almost always contributed with consideration and enthusiasm because the project was of interest to them.

There was another sense in which I was inept. I had never been a competitive surfer and had no direct experience of the surf club scene, or the inside workings of the large companies and the surfing media (apart from my role as an advertiser and occasional copy contributor). For these facets of the subculture full participant observation was impractical. I did observe a number of competitions, ranging from small club events to the large professional competition at Bells Beach, and hung around surfboard riding clubs and industry sites talking to people and observing, but the broad scale of the research prevented me from gaining access via the long term evolutionary route of "interloper, novice and then probationer" (Rock 1979: 199). Instead I used informants to supplement my observations through informal conversations, intensive interviews, as well as documents and 'other sources' (see section later in this chapter). I still had insider status as a surfer while also taking the role of the acceptable incompetent in regards to these specific facets of the subculture. This insider status served to facilitate a dialogue with a higher level of technical and personal detail than could otherwise have been achieved. An important qualification in regard to the use of informants stems from the need to remain appropriately sceptical of personal accounts. The degree of scepticism applied to the informant comes down to the judgement of the observer, based on criteria such as what level of expertise the informant has; what motivation might there be to deceive; what sector or faction of the subculture are they from; do they appear to be giving a considered account; and are they prone to exaggeration? It is always

**Plate 2**


On the way to Red Bluff, one of the remote locations in Western Australia.

Participant observation

The author with 'quiver' of surfboards; including a 'longboard' and two 'shortboards'.

preferable to corroborate information gained in this way even when the informant appears highly credible. Even when the accounts are proven to be defective they can still be useful; "... the observer can interpret such statements and descriptions as indications of the individual's perspective on the point involved" (Becker 1970: 29), and this may help inform an understanding of other issues, such as conflicts or allegiances at play within the subculture.

A specific example of this occurred when a surfboard rider told me that bodyboarders couldn't experience what it really meant to surf. Rather than simply accepting this as information about bodyboarders it needed corroboration from accounts of the surfing experience by bodyboarders and analysis of their media. I also noted it as information about a surfer's attitude towards bodyboarders (which needed corroboration from other surfboard riders and their media in order to find whether this attitude was widespread). The same approach has been applied to intensive interviews and accounts in the media.

*Participant or Observer*

There is a potential problem inherent in participant observation - maintaining a balance between being a participant and being an observer.

> Excessive reliance on either state is held to impede research, but the two cannot be synthesized. In the main, the tension is resolved by formulating ideas and explanations *in situ*. (Rock 1979: 237).

As indicated above, I found the management of the dual roles relatively unproblematic. I have been a surfer for a lot longer than I have been a sociologist. I learnt my craft as a sociologist while remaining a surfer. As an undergraduate I constantly applied what I learnt in analysis of the world around me. Observation of and participation in surfing culture was a well established, almost habitual behaviour which I had managed seamlessly for a long time. Some researchers practice a strategy of 'withdrawal and return' in order to avoid 'going native' (Rock 1979: 202). I practiced this on a mental level; not so as to avoid going native, but as a virtually unconscious fluctuation between going about the mental business of participation, and analysis of that business. Following Rock (1979), the tension was resolved *in situ*, before it became manifest. The problem for this study was not the *management* of the two roles but

whether my identity as a surfer corrupted my ability to observe and dispassionately analyze the subculture.

According to Babbie (1989) the problem for the participant-as-observer is one of identifying too much with the interests and viewpoints of the group and thereby losing 'scientific detachment'. The dilemma is well summarized by Rock:

> Marginality suspends the sociologist's natural attitude and renders the reality of others strange and interesting. It enables him to appreciate the problematic quality of social life in a manner alien to all complete participants. ... But marginality also exiles the sociologist from the critical domain of meaning and symbolic process. He may infer connections, unities and salient themes without any warrant. He must himself share the natural attitudes and, in doing so, is likely to dismiss the very problems that once engaged him (Rock 1979: 211).

For me it was not a question of being absorbed into an alien culture and 'going native'. As indicated above, the management of my identity as surfer/sociologist was well established and, to the extent that anyone can detach their researcher selves from their political, sexual, emotional and other selves, then a loss of scientific detachment was not an issue. But there remains a possibility that I may have treated some aspects of the subculture as unproblematic which a non-surfer might find of interest. My withdrawal from the surfing 'scene' over the previous ten years or so would have been of benefit in this regard, however in the end I can only trust in my skill as a sociologist to overcome this potential problem. I am reassured however by the number of sociologists who have successfully converted their own life worlds into objects of ethnographic study; among them Becker's study of jazz musicians, Roth's study of a tuberculosis ward, and Polsky's study of pool hustlers (Rock 1979: 214).

Another important feature of the dichotomy between participation and observation is the ability of the investigator to observe their own behaviour, attitudes and emotions as well as those of others. Through self observation and self analysis I was my own case study in effect. As an expert insider I was also a constant source of in-depth information. This process was especially valuable in the analysis of bodily experience. The field notes reproduced in Chapter 6 relating to my deliberations over the prospects of surfing some particularly large waves provide a good

example of this. The information gleaned in this way provided a basis for exploring similarity and difference in others.

*Recording Data*

As mentioned, I was careful not to be seen taking field notes. I carried a note pad with me in my car so that I could jot down notes on site without being conspicuous. I would write up the field notes in my tent using a laptop computer[11], usually in the evening after undertaking participant observation.

At each new location I would record significant characteristics regarding the geography, local surf politics, the surfing population, information about the surf, and any other features of note as they came to my attention. Casual conversations of significance and 'quotable quotes' were jotted down as soon as possible and over a period of time a picture of each location, its general characteristics and dynamics developed. Writing up the fieldnotes also involved 'fleshing out' the analysis that had gone on during the day and relating what I had observed to the relevant theories.

## Intensive Interviews

Lofland and Lofland (1984) define intensive interviews as 'guided conversations' aimed at providing rich and detailed information for qualitative analysis. They recognize that interviews (conversations) are an integral part of participant observation and that much of the information gathered in the field is through informal interview. The combination of participant observation and intensive interviews is said to be the best way of researching the kind of 'existential experiences of the self' which is a central theme of this research (Lofland and Lofland 1984: 14).

In this study I distinguished between informal interviews and intensive interviews quite clearly. The former were usually unplanned and recorded in the fieldnotes, while the latter were organized in advance, an interview guide prepared, and they were taped on a micro cassette. Comments about the interviews (e.g. the setting, perceptions, attitudes, off-tape comments) were recorded as field notes after leaving the respondent.

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[11] I used an inverter to recharge the laptop from the car's dual battery system.

The interviews usually lasted from 1 to 2 hours. The 31 respondents were either key figures or representative of certain facets of the subculture (see Fig. F). They came from all levels of industry, the sporting bureaucracy, the media, competitive surfing, as well as local identities. The selection of these interviewees was based on:

i) my own knowledge of the surfing subculture;
ii) conversations with local surfers at the research locations;
iii) recommendations by other interviewees and informants; and
iv) through the literature on surfing and in the surfing media.

My link with industry proved invaluable here as it provided me with a network of connections and personal recommendations which facilitated access to some public figures with unlisted telephone numbers.

Two of the interview sessions were 'group interviews' - Tom and Jerry, and Danny and friends. This was done because they felt more comfortable that way. I was prepared to discount these interviews if it turned out they became distorted, through competition to be the most outrageous for example, or dominated by any one participant, but these problems did not arise in either session. Following Lofland and Lofland's (1984) observations, the process allowed interviewees time to reflect, and disagreements provided greater depth.

The gender imbalance (28 men and 3 women) reflects the imbalance in key positions within the bureaucracy and industry. There is also an age imbalance, with only 4 of the interviewees 25 years old or younger when this group makes up a significant proportion of the surfing population. There is also a disproportionate number of interviewees from urban locations. As with the women, the latter two inequities are due to the lack of representation in key positions. The age and urban imbalances were compensated for by frequent 'informal interviews' in the course of the field work. This compensation was less successful with regard to women surfers as they are greatly outnumbered by men, and most are in the under 25 age group (many are under 18). As a middle aged male surfer, engaging in conversation with these young women can be problematic. I usually limited these informal interviews to women in areas where my research role was well known, and in other areas to those women I came into contact with through the research in other ways; e.g. they had been in

**Figure F: Intensive Interviews: Demographics and Areas of Expertise by Sex***

| DEMOGRAPHICS | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sex** | **Age** | | | | | **Location** | | |
| | 16-25 | 26-35 | 36-45 | 46-55 | >55 | Urban | Country | Remote |
| N=28 Male | 3 | 6 | 9 | 9 | 1 | 20 | 3 | 5 |
| N=3 Female | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| **Total** | **4** | **7** | **9** | **10** | **1** | **21** | **4** | **6** |

| AREAS OF EXPERTISE | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sex** | **Surfcraft** | | **Surf Industry Sector** | | | **Surf Media Sector** | | **Sport Surfing Sector** | | | **Other** | | |
| | Bodyboard | Longboard | Retail | Manufacturing (Clothing & Accessories) | Manufacturing (Surfboard) | Magazine | Video | Competition | Sponsorship | Sports Admin | No Connection With Previous 3 Sectors | Counter Culture | Women's Issues |
| N=28 Male | 5 | 9 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 17 | 14 | 7 | 7 | 24 | 10 |
| N=3 Female | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| **Total** | **6** | **9** | **5** | **12** | **6** | **6** | **3** | **19** | **15** | **9** | **8** | **27** | **13** |

**Note:**
- The total number of interviewees is 31.
- Each interviewee has more than one area of expertise.

* See Appendix 2 for details on interviewees, and Appendix 3 for an explanation of the categories.

mixed company when I approached a group, or I had been introduced, or as an adjunct to the questionnaire - a clip board and pen provided a legitimating prop for this purpose.

The intensive interviews were informal conversations guided by a checklist of subject areas and some specific questions, which varied depending on the interviewee. All interviews began with a request for some personal information (e.g. age, occupation, surfing history). All interviews broached the topics of bodily experience, sportization and commodification. Apart from these core themes the interviews focussed on the particular expertise or insights which the interviewee had to offer. This would usually involve a combination of topics including their local surfing culture.

Because some topics were covered by all the interviews, I present some of this information as 'quasi-statistical' data, taking note of Becker's (1970: 31-2) caution that in doing so it is not appropriate to claim 'truths' but 'likelihood'. Lofland and Lofland (1984: 102-3) also suggest that the data be presented with 'humility' and in a 'qualified' way. This data has only been used to support the participant observation and the questionnaire data - not as a 'stand alone' source of information.

*Recording Data*

The interviews were not transcribed. Instead a summary of topics, main points and significant quotes was made for each interview. The position on the tape recorder counter was noted next to each of these points so that I was able to return to the desired part of any interview recording whenever necessary. This was time consuming but had the added bonus of allowing me to revisit the interview and its nuances of tone and mood.

## Questionnaire

A survey recording demographic data, attitudes and behaviours for 129 surfers was conducted by me in the form of a questionnaire - consisting of closed and open-ended questions - at 18 surfing sites around the country (see Appendix 4) . A minimum of ten percent of those actually observed surfing at any one site were surveyed via 'purposive sampling' (Babbie

1989: 204) by gender, age, surfing experience, competitive involvement, and surfcraft type.

As noted above, Bauman (1992: 192) considers statistical analysis of no value because society has become so unpredictable and unstable; "Significance and numbers have parted ways". But my experience of surfing culture led me to question Bauman in this regard and so this quantitative survey, in conjunction with the qualitative data, provides an opportunity to pick up on common properties and general patterns which may be found across the subculture, as well as assist in linking variations in the culture with say demographic, local or factional phenomena.

Because of the breadth of the ethnographic research the addition of a quantitative element provided an especially valuable means of triangulation.

> Just as he is more convinced if he has many items of evidence than if he has a few, so he is more convinced of a conclusion's validity if he has *many kinds* of evidence (Becker 1970: 32).

While Sayer (1992) supports the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative methods in the research design, he warns against conflating and confusing the two sets of data.

The survey was not designed to provide an accurate representation of the larger surfing population but to sample a range of *surfer* types at a range of *surfing site* types (see Fig. G). Babbie (1989) claims that the purposive or 'judgemental' sampling used to pick the surfer and location types is appropriate when the researcher has a good knowledge of the object of the study, and when it is impractical to enumerate the desired subset in order to design a quota sample. In this study my purposive sampling provided an achievable framework, and one which delivered worthwhile data for comparative purposes.

I endeavoured to sample from each of the categories at each location, although this was not always possible, depending on how free the locals were with information on surfing sites, and the surfing conditions at these sites at the time of the field work. The choice of sites could also be described as purposive sampling in that I chose them as representative of subsets of each location without being able to adequately quantify the number of these sites at each location. This division involved sampling

**Figure G: Surfer Questionnaire: Purposive Sampling by Site Type***

| Site Type | Age | | Surfing Experience (years) | | | Sex | | Sport | | Surfcraft | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | < 26 | > 25 | < 3 | 3-10 | > 10 | Male | Female | Competitor | Non Competitor | Shortboard | Longboard | Bodyboard | Other |
| N=54 Urban | 40 | 14 | 9 | 27 | 18 | 48 | 6 | 10 | 44 | 32 | 2 | 14 | 2 |
| N=66 Country | 42 | 24 | 9 | 29 | 28 | 60 | 6 | 21 | 45 | 49 | 11 | 8 | 2 |
| N=9 Remote | 6 | 3 | | 2 | 7 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 9 | - | - | - |
| **Total** | **88** | **41** | **18** | **58** | **53** | **116** | **13** | **32** | **97** | **90** | **13** | **22** | **4** |

**Note:**

- The total number of respondents was 129
- While some surfers declared that they sometimes use different categories of craft, only the primary surfcraft specified has been accounted for in this table.
- 'Other' surfcraft refers to kneeboards, wave skis and bodysurfing
- The urban, country and remote categories will not always match with those of the relevant base location since the sites where the survey was conducted can be some distance and quite distinct in this way from the base.

* See Appendix 3 for an explanation of the categories.

sites based on their degree of difficulty in order to sample surfers with differing degrees of experience. Another purposive sample within the location was competition sites, so as to ensure a sample of competitive surfers. Also sites which were dominated by certain surfcraft were sampled in order to ensure adequate data on these different surfer types. This purposive site sampling was carried out wherever the range of sites existed within reasonable travelling distance of a base location. As Babbie (1989) points out, this method of sampling does not provide meaningful information on the population as a whole, but it does allow for comparisons to be drawn between the sampled subsets, and this is the purpose to which it has been put.

Each individual questionnaire records information about the site as well as general information about the individual; age, sex, occupation, and income. The bulk of the questionnaire concentrates on the individuals' surfing career, their lifestyles and attitudes as they relate to important facets of surfing subculture - such as competitive surfing, the surfing industry, and other surfer subgroups - and their motivations for surfing. These questions were designed to provide quantitative data for the various areas of the thesis' enquiry. They allow for cross referencing between individual characteristics, lifestyle choices, attitudes, behaviours, and surfer types. The survey sample, while significant in terms of surfers on site, is not large enough to go beyond fairly simple analysis and therefore the use of a spreadsheet was adequate for the purpose.

As mentioned previously, I used a clip board when administering the questions and this often proved useful as a symbolic prop for my identity as a researcher, denoting that I was in research mode in locations where my dual identity was common knowledge, and easing access to respondents where I was unknown. The latter situation depended on the nature of the site; if it was a mainstream public beach then I was just one of many different types of people on the beach and my presence was not so intrusive. If the site was simply a surfing spot then as an outsider I needed to establish myself as a surfer first (by going surfing) and a researcher second. The situations were not always so clear cut however, and I experienced some antagonism from surfers who thought I was doing market research. It was totally unacceptable - especially for a surfer (who should know better) - to ruin the ambience of a country beach scene

with such a crass commercial activity. Once the confusion was sorted out the research was regarded as perfectly acceptable.

### Other Sources of Information

Other sources of information included the surfing subculture's books about surfing and surfers, surfing videos and magazines, internal and public documents and reports from surfing's administrative bodies, and promotional material from these sporting bodies and from industry. They were a direct source of information in regards to historical, social, cultural and technical data, and also as objects of analysis as cultural artefacts in their own rite.

The books studied included historical and other reflective accounts (Carroll 1991; Cassidy & Luton 1989; Lueras 1984; Maxwell 1949; Young & McGregor 1983), biographies and autobiographies of prominent surfers and other personal accounts of the surfing life (Bartholomew & Baker 1996; Carroll & Wilcox 1994; Doyle 1994; Duane 1996; Farrelly & McGregor 1967; Lyon & Lyon 1997; Martin 1991; Noll & Gabbard 1989; Stell 1992; Young 1999), and instructive texts (Thornley & Dante 1998; Lowdon & Lowdon 1994; Young 1986).

The videos studied were 'cult' productions, not mainstream representations of surfing. As a young surfer I had seen every surfing film that came to town at least once, and I am aware of the format and general content of productions through the 1970s and early 1980s. A small sample of significant productions from this era (which were available on video) were viewed for this study: *Surf Down Under* 1958; *The Endless Summer* 1966; *Evolution* 1969; and *Morning of the Earth* 1971.

Along with the popularity of video came a new era in these cult productions. Independent producers could no longer make money screening films at theatres and so those that remained in business usually produce videos for the large surf industry companies, or a range of smaller companies which advertise throughout their productions. The fragmentation of the subculture produced niche markets for videos; longboards, bodyboards, competition, and counter culture. A more intensive study of these recent videos was undertaken: *Longboards: The*

*Rebirth of Cool* 1990s (independent production - longboards); *Liquid Lust* 1990s (Rusty surfboards production - high energy shortboards); *Hawaii Nine Four* 1994 and *Hawaii Nine Six* 1996 (multiple sponsors for each - mainly high energy shortboards); *Kelly Slater in Kolor* 1990s (Slater productions - a profile); *Metaphysical: Surfing a Higher Level* 1996. (Quiksilver production - counter culture/competition cross over); *Endless Summer II* 1994. (mainstream theatre release); *Litmus* 1990s. (independent production - counter culture); *Under Down Under* 1997. (independent production - amateur)

I had been an avid reader of surfing magazines in the 1970s and early 1980s, and have a collection of magazines from this era of my own and access to those of fellow surfers; predominantly *Tracks* and *Surfing World.* At the time these magazines targeted the general surfing population. From 1994 to 1998 I read current issues of the following Australian publications: almost all issues of *Australia's Surfing Life,* and *Waves* - which target under 25 year olds - and all issues of *Australian Surfer's Journal* - which targets over 25 year olds. I also read issues of *Tracks* and *Underground Surf* (under 25s), *Shred Betty* (women under 25), *Surfing World* and *Deep* (over 25s), *Rip Tide* (bodyboarders), *Pacific Longboarder* (longboarders), *Free Surf* (free - general audience), and *Wet Side* (Western Australian publication - general audience). Some of these commenced and some of them ceased publication during the course of the research.

The study of the videos and magazines was based on purposive sampling whereby a range of video types and magazine types produced over a period of time were analysed. The study did not involve formal content analysis nor provide any quantitative data. While taking account of the text and points of significance, such as the portrayal of women in surfing, the primary purpose was to investigate the development of a surfing aesthetic through the images presented in the media. Representations of the sublime became a particular focus. This basic semiotic study informed the analysis of surfers' comments on the aesthetics of surfing, either recorded in the process of participant observation and intensive interview, or in the books, videos and magazines themselves.

The documents and reports were supplied by *Surfing Australia Inc.* and other affiliated bodies, and included policy statements, rules and

regulations, competition details and schedules, mission statements, and press releases, as well as internal correspondence and documentation used to support government grant applications. One report on the economic impact of the Bell's Beach Easter competition on the Surf Coast Shire was supplied by that shire council.

These sources provided valuable facts and figures pertaining to the realm of competitive surfing, its bureaucratic structure, and the structure and extent of professional and amateur surfing in Australia and overseas. They also provided numerical and economic data on the surfing industry, the surfing media, and on rates of participation in surfing.

During the course of this study I collected all the promotional material I came in contact with. Some of this material was from *Surfing Australia Inc.* and other sporting bodies, promoting competitions, coaching clinics or other events, but the majority of it was from the surfing industry, especially the 'big three' companies - *Rip Curl, Quiksilver* and *Billabong*. This material ranged from the tags on clothing to glossy brochures and advertisements in magazines and video productions.

There was some straightforward information to be gained from this promotional material, especially from the sporting bodies, but the main reason for the study was to analyze the way in which the industry and the sporting bodies promoted themselves; the image they presented; the aesthetic approaches.

## Analyzing the Data

Bringing the different forms of data together to inform the thesis involved extracting information from the different sources and creating a series of notes dedicated to each chapter. These included summaries and quotes from the literature review and surfing media, interviews, questionnaire data, field notes, notes from personal experience, and extracts from the journal of musings I kept throughout the research and writing process.

This collection of data was then edited into the analytic sections within each set of notes. One piece of data could appear more than once in each set of notes under different section headings. This repetition was also the

case across the series of chapter notes. For example, a quote from Gail Austen informed both the section on women in surfing's past in Chapter 4, and the section on women and risk-taking in Chapter 5.

While primary data from the questionnaire were used at this point, often, and especially in regards to cross tabulation, it was used to answer questions which arose during the analysis; e.g. to test propositions or compare with other sources of data, either mine or someone else's.

Analysis of the data involved a lot of repetitious work. The interviews, fieldnotes etc. were often revisited in their raw form in order to be investigated from the different anlytic perspectives. The breadth of the study exacerbated this process since data from so many diverse locations and sectors of the subculture needed to be brought together in order to create an understanding of the consistencies and diversities, the dynamics and tensions, that constitute surfing culture on a national scale. For example, gaining an understanding of competitive surfing involved an analysis and synthesis of the data from all sites - including surfer types, media, industry and bureaucracy - across the country. Given a more orthodox ethnography, restricted to one location, the process would have been far less complex.

## Ethics

Lofland and Lofland (1984: 18) entreat us to consider the ethical implications of the proposed research before proceeding. They say to first reflect on whether *anyone* should study the subject, and secondly whether *you* should study it.

The surfing subculture has been the subject of studies in the past and, as far as I am aware, without controversy. The subculture is not secretive (apart from keeping 'secret spots' hidden from other surfers), in fact quite the opposite, surfers freely tell outsiders about the joys of surfing, and even oppositional behaviour is often in the form of public display rather than covert activity (Irwin 1973; Booth 1995). Surfing has been linked with drug-taking since the 1960s, but even this behaviour is publicly discussed in the surfing media and in a number of recent biographies and autobiographies (e.g. Bartholomew & Baker 1996; Carroll & Wilcox 1994;

Stell 1992; Young 1999). But this openness did not necessarily extend to submitting to mainstream investigations by social scientists, and for this reason my status as a surfer was of value. Regardless of whether I *should* have undertaken the research, my status as an insider meant that I *could.*

But even from an ethical point of view I believe that being a surfer was an advantage; I did not have to put up a front and so minimized the need for deception. I also found that being transparent about my research eased access to individuals for questionnaires and interviews. There were two areas where what I consider to be an acceptable level of deception was practiced:

i) in the display of separation of my 'self' as participant and observer; and

ii) in my marketing role, in that I had ulterior research motives.

In discussing the ethical dilemmas of participant observation Rock (1979) points out that the research rarely benefits those studied; "... the sociologist often experiences a certain guilt, a sense of having betrayed, a stench of disreputability about himself" (Davis in Rock 1979: 203). While it is likely that my use of data and my analysis will not please all those who have been involved in the research, I have yet to feel any guilt. One justification for this is that I am hopeful the study will make some positive contribution to the current reflexive surge within the subculture.

The construction of a surfing museum, a Hall of Fame, a steady stream of biographies and autobiographies, the publication of magazines indulging in reflexivity and myth making, even the retro fashions in clothing, surfboards and surfing styles, are all symptomatic of a search for roots; an anchorage in history; a 'reproduction of the real' common in fragmenting postmodern societies. This mood of reflexivity was significant I am sure, in the level of interest and cooperation I encountered. It also justifies my research from my position as a surfer; i.e. as a surfer/sociologist subject to the same processes of postmodernization I have engaged in a sociological analysis of the subculture, contributing what I can to this introspection.

Prior to each 'Intensive Interview', each interviewee was presented with a statement which both of us signed. The statement was a requirement from the university's ethics committee which guaranteed the interviewee

anonymity. It was also a declaration that I had explained my research and that the interviewee was under no obligation and could discontinue the interview or decline to answer any questions as they wished. From the point of view of the research, the formality which this process introduced was both a hindrance and a help. Many of the interviewees recoiled from the document. Up until the time I presented it the interview was seen as a private informal matter between fellow surfers; the statement introduced a public, mainstream legalistic element to the process which took some getting around at times.

One interviewee with a prominent public profile was reluctant to go ahead with the process because they were unhappy about not being credited with their insights. Similarly some other well known personalities expressed an opinion that it seemed an unnecessary formality. The interviews with these well-known figures presented difficulties for me in the write-up as many of them were authors, subjects of biographies and autobiographies, and regularly featured in magazine articles and videos. The interviews often provided clarification of information in these public sources, but the requirement for anonymity prevented me from making these connections. The University has since accepted the proposition that I have the interviewees sign a release for any comments attributed to them. I have done this wherever possible, otherwise anonymity has been retained. Where reference is made to specific interviewees, those with pseudonyms appear with an asterisk; e.g. (Peter* interview 1995).

Once the initial difficulties which this statement presented were overcome, it provided an atmosphere of confidentiality which was of considerable value. This was especially the case with matters that would otherwise be influenced by financial concerns or the maintenance of public fronts and loyalties. On the other hand the anonymity also provided a freedom from responsibility which meant that controversial or significant statements needed to be corroborated satisfactorily before they could be used.

Other measures to ensure ethical practice included seeking permission before recording conversations, and ensuring anonymity of all subjects (unless they preferred otherwise).

## Conclusion

The current state of social change calls for ethnographic studies in order to inform theoretical responses to these changes. Orthodox ethnography requires the researcher to immerse themselves over an extended period in the everyday lives of a bounded community. This study is unorthodox in that its boundaries - although still focussed on one subculture - are national.

The research model adopted from Sayer (1992) recognizes theory as integral to the research process. It also incorporates intensive with general research; something which this study has managed to deliver over a fairly short period of time as a result of my background in surfing; i.e. each new location, each interview and observation was based on decades of involvement, as was the design of the study itself. If it were not for the expertise in surfing which I brought to the study its national focus would have been at the expense of adequate depth. The key factor in countering problems of objectivity was that I started learning my craft as a sociologist when I was already an experienced surfer. I learned my craft 'practicing' theory on the surfing subculture; by objectifying the world in which I lived (something which is said to be a characteristic/symptom of postmodernity).

The particular mode of research conducted for this study is not one which can be readily adopted to suit all sociological problems. The availability of researchers steeped in the area in question is a major limiting factor. However, there is a tradition of this kind of research in symbolic interactionism which is readily adapted to the job of contributing concrete data to the theoretical debates on current social and cultural change.

# CHAPTER 4
# PLEASURE & DISCIPLINE:
# SURFING 'S PAST & PRESENT FORMS

> *For my part, I should like nothing better, if I could do it, than to get balanced on a board just before a rushing wave, and so be hurried in half or quarter of a mile landward with the speed of a race-horse, all the time enveloped in foam and spray, but without letting the roller break and tumble over my head. ... [Surfing] is so attractive and full of wild excitement to Hawaiians, and withal so healthy, that I cannot but hope it will be many years before civilization shall look it out of countenance, or make it disreputable to indulge in this manly, though it be dangerous, exercise.*
>
> - *Reverend Henry T. Cheever (1851)* (Lueras 1984: 50-1)

In this chapter I first provide an historical background to the current form of surfing culture in Australia. This involves a brief examination of the ancient surfing culture of the Hawaiian islanders, its decline and modern renaissance as a tourist attraction, and its development as a post WW2 youth subculture in California and Australia.

I then outline the subcultural framework I use to analyze contemporary surfing culture before providing an overview of the subculture in Australia. This examination is at a mid-range macro level, addressing surfer types, significant sites, mythology, and current trends. It is informed by an analysis of subcultural resistance *to* and incorporation *by* the parent culture.

A conflict between aesthetic and rational orientations is found to be evident within surfing's various cultural forms since before its modern renaissance. This continues in its present subcultural mode manifest in a complex dialectic between a postmodern subculture and its postmodernizing parent culture.

## A Surfing History

Any thorough study of surfing should be based on an understanding of its history. This section informs the reader about where the practice of surfing has come from and a brief understanding of the issues and themes

which helped shape its current Australian form. It reveals a tension between the sensual enjoyment of the activity for its own sake, and the imposition of rational order. This dynamic between the Apollonian and Dionysian modes (Rojek 1995; Turner 1996) is evident from early in the modern renaissance of surfing and proves to be a defining feature of the culture.

*Hawaiian History*

Estimates of the origins of surfing claim that it could go back as far as three or four thousand years in the Pacific Islands of Polynesia, becoming a part of Hawaiian life around 400 A.D. (Scures 1986: 4). According to Finney's (1959) study of surfing[12] as a 'culture complex', it probably spread through East Polynesia from Tahiti and arose independently in Melanesia and Micronesia.

> Surfing was practiced in Oceania from New Guinea in the West to Easter Island in the East, and from Hawaii in the North to New Zealand in the South (Finney 1959: 9-22).

Finney (1959: 122-123) says that only in Tahiti and Hawaii did the surfers ride their solid wood boards in the standing position and that in Hawaii surfing reached a 'cultural peak', involving sacred rituals, contests, gambling, sexual freedoms, sports deities and surf invocations and sacred sites. Participation was open to all; although chiefs had special boards called *olos*, their own style of surfing on the large, rolling swells, and probably exclusive rights to certain surfing locations.

The important place surfing occupied in Hawaiian life is illustrated by this quotation from the 19th century Hawaiian scholar, Kepelino Keauokalani, speaking about the month of November when the biggest surf occurs:

> For expert surfers going upland to farm, if part way up perhaps they look back and see the rollers combing the beach, will leave their work ... pick up the board and go. All thought of work is at an end, only that of sport is left. The wife may go hungry, the children, the whole family, but the head of the house does not care. He is all for sport, that is his food. All day there is nothing but surfing. Many go out surfing as early as four in the morning - men, women, children (Lueras 1984: 30).

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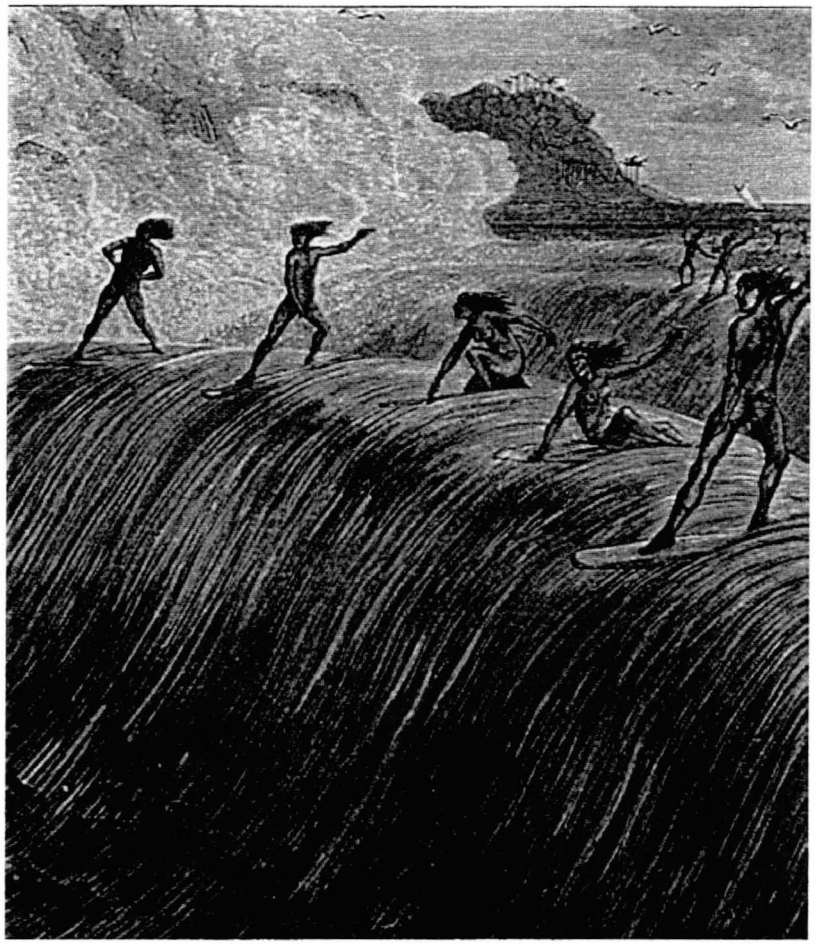
[12]Finney's study of surfing was limited to the use of surfboards (whether used in the prone, kneeling, sitting or standing positions) and did not include body surfing or the use of any other craft.

**Plate 3**



19th Century image depicting Hawaiians surfing (Margan & Finney, 1970)


Duke Kahanamoku and friends, Hawaii 1920. Surfing had been revived to become a tourist attraction in Waikiki (Margan & Finney 1970)

By the early 1900s however, surfing had all but disappeared from the Hawaiian Islands. The minimal amount of surfing which still occurred suffered:

> "... a loss of such traditional features as the sexual element, the contests and betting, the special role of the chiefs in surfing, and the sacred aspects" (Finney 1959: 123).

The *olo* board was no longer used and waves were no longer ridden across the face of an unbroken wave, but straight in to shore. "Surfing might be said to have returned to its infancy ..the whole pastime relatively unelaborated and practiced by a few" (Finney 1959: 71-72).

Finney claims that the decline of surfing should be seen in the context of acculturation processes since Euro-American occupation. In what amounted to a cultural revolution, the abandonment of the traditional tabu system in 1819, and the consequential collapse of the traditional religion, were highly significant disorganizing factors for the native culture. With the arrival of missionaries in 1820 the activities associated with surfing were forbidden and interest in the sport waned (Finney 1959: 62-67)

Just as surfing was at its lowest ebb, Caucasian interest in the sport generated a renaissance with the formation of two surfing clubs at Waikiki (Finney 1949; Lueras 1984); The Hawaiian Outrigger Canoe Club, formed in 1908 by a Caucasian entrepreneur with the aim of preserving surfing and "... to give an added and permanent attraction to Hawaii and make Waikiki always the Home of the Surfer..." (Lueras 1984: 68), and the Hui Nalu club, which was formed in 1911 to promote surfing amongst the native Hawaiians.

Lueras (1984: 68) also attributes credit for the revival to a 'best-selling literary lion', Jack London, who created an interest in surfing as a leisure activity for tourists with a travel piece in the October 1907 issue of *Woman's Own Companion,* and later a chapter in his book *The Cruise of the Snark.* He claims that "London did for the promotion of surfing what Ernest Hemingway would do in the 1940s for bullfighting and sportsfishing". The following is an example of London's work published in 1907:

> Where but the moment before was only the wide desolation and invincible roar, is now a man, erect, full-statured ... he is flying

> through the air, flying forward, flying fast as the surge on which he stands. He is a Mercury - a brown Mercury. His heels are winged, and in them is the swiftness of the sea... (in Lueras 1984: 68).

An Irish-Hawaiian, George Freeth (who was London's 'brown Mercury'), was invited to California in 1907 by the Pacific Electric Railway to promote their Los Angeles-Redondo Beach Spur and introduced surfing to the mainland of the United States

*Surfing USA*

Although George Freeth is said to have been the first to bring surfing to the mainland United States (he died from influenza in 1919), it is Duke Kahanamoku who is credited with being the 'father of modern surfing'. A world champion swimmer from 1912 to 1929 (Young & McGregor 1983: 43), *The Duke,* as he was known, became a mainstream hero; mixing with the 'beautiful people' of Hollywood; playing supporting roles in a number of films; saving lives at the beach and travelling the world with his swimming and surfing exhibitions. The Duke's surfing exhibitions inspired many to take up surfboard riding in the US (Lueras 1984: 96) and by 1928 the first *Pacific Coast Surf Board Championships* were held. "In addition to surf board races there will be canoe tilting contests, paddling races and a surf board life-saving demonstration" (*The Daily Register* of July 31, 1928 in Lueras 1984: 107).

It was at this competition that Tom Blake introduced his hollow paddleboard and won the championships. His patented board reduced the weight from about 140lb (64kg) to about 85lb (39kg). The board was designed to win the prestigious paddle races and was of little benefit in maneuvering while surfing, in fact some claimed it was a backward step. But in 1935 Blake put a fin on the bottom of his board which improved its maneuverability greatly and amplified surfing's 'fun factor' (Lueras 1984: 107; Young & McGregor 1983: 49).

By this stage there were about 500 regular surfers in southern California, most belonging to seven surfing clubs . These clubs were recreational, pre-subcultural, middle class groups according to Irwin (1973: 131-132). Although as Schwendinger and Schwendinger (1985) point out, the clubs were quite diverse in their lifestyles, ranging from the conservative Palos Verdes Club (which threatened to ostracize one of its members who took

six months off school just to surf, for 'sponging, lack of direction and non-productiveness') to surfers in the Santa Monica and Venice Beach area, who, according to a local youth camp director, were;

> Beach Bums ... [who] promenaded in old denim pants with large gaping holes and nondescript, ragged cotton shirts and blouses; they could be seen wearing partly unraveled straw hats. ...The boys kept their pants up with frayed ropes ... and the girls wore men's faded blue jeans ... (Schwendinger and Schwendinger 1985: 96-97).

According to Irwin, World War 2 'swept up' most of the conventionally oriented surfers into the services, their clubs disbanded, and surfing entered its subcultural stage (Irwin 1973: 134; Scures 1986: 8). An intensity of involvement, experimentation, innovation and spontaneity were the hallmarks of 'classical surfing'; "... groups of wartime and postwar disaffiliates pieced together an almost total life style ..." based around wave riding and beach life (Irwin 1973: 137).

> I think it was because we had spent four or five years in war and we had survived. And it had all been bad. Now there was no question about what had us by the throat. It was the ocean. Everything else was secondary (surfer in Irwin 1973: 134-135).

After this 'articulation' of the surfing subculture there was a period of rapid expansion. Irwin (1973: 142-148) attributes this expansion to:

i) the production of the fiberglass Malibu surfboard which was lighter (weighing about 30lb (14kg)) and more maneuverable;
ii) the media - surf music, magazines, amateur films, and the discovery of surfing by Hollywood (*Gidget* 1957 and the series of 'beach blanket' movies which followed); and
iii) the infiltration of surfing into the ranks of the intermediate, low prestige strata in high schools.

Irwin claims that the rapid increase in the surfing population resulted in the corruption and decline of the surfing scene. This he says occurred as a result of increased competitiveness and invidiousness between surfers through competition for waves and for status. The search for status was easier if you followed the set patterns and as a result spontaneity and experimentation were stifled. To gain surfing skills took a long time and so newcomers, eager for acceptance, became 'pseudo-surfers', taking on the trappings of the lifestyle in the manner of conspicuous display. The process of identity construction, especially for those living some distance

from the beach, is said to have been influenced by media reports which began to focus on the deviant behaviour of surfers; newcomers took such behaviour as the norm which resulted in a spiraling of lewd behaviour, wild parties, theft and other 'anti-social' behaviour. "[T]he spirit of the irresponsible, untrammeled, uncomplicated life of surfing was converted ... to the spirit of conspicuous display of abandon to an external audience" (Irwin 1973: 148-154).

Eventually the number of 'pseudo-surfers' dominated the scene and surfing lost its prestige. By 1965 numbers started declining rapidly (Irwin 1973: 156). In an effort to regain mainstream respectability and stop the backlash against surfing's oppositional turn (involving the banning of surfboards from some beaches) some surfers formed clubs which were oriented, as in the pre WW2 period, to surfing as an organized competitive sport. "The effect of this was to create a large number of 'professional' surfers, and their followers who are committed to surfing as an organized, competitive sport..." (Irwin 1973: 154-157). Irwin says that there were still some groups of surfers who clung to the 'old surfing patterns' - by which he means the lifestyles established in his classical stage, during and immediately after WW2.

***Bronzed Aussies***

The literature on early surfing history in Australia focuses on the beaches of Sydney and the struggle around the turn of this century against the laws which banned open sea bathing in daylight hours. Maxwell describes early indulgence in the surf as consisting of 'cautious vertical motion':

> Cinderella men, pale slaves to striking clocks, taking their joy of the sea furtively in the hour before dawn, piling their clothes on the sand and running nude into the breakers. ... inviting the ocean's might against tensed, eager bodies, living a little while dangerously, and afterwards enjoying the relaxation that comes with content" (Maxwell 1949: 5-6).

The restrictions on bathing hours were enforced in conjunction with regulations requiring neck-to-knee bathing costumes and sexual segregation. Pearson (1982a) claims that the authorities' stance on these matters contributed to an increasing number of fatalities (in 1902 there were 17 drownings at Manly alone). Organized groups formed in order to improve safety and to fight the puritanical laws. In November 1903 the

Manly Council decided to allow all-day bathing and other Council's soon followed. According to Margan and Finney (1970), this resulted in a 'mass exodus' to the beaches.

> The sandhills behind the ocean became cluttered with homes and shops, the beaches crowded with people ... The move into the ocean had begun (Margan & Finney 1970: 40).

In 1906 a group of free bathing movement activists became the core of the *Bondi Surf Bathers' Life Saving Club*, the first organization of its kind in the world. This volunteer system spread across the country, and the umbrella organization, the Surf Lifesaving Association of Australia (SLSA), became responsible for beach safety around the country, developing skills and techniques suited to open sea rescue. By the 1930s the 'bronzed' surf lifesaver had become an icon, 'the paragon of national manhood' (Fiske et al. 1987: 64).

The clubs' activities centred around rescue patrols and competitions held between the various clubs as well as social events. The competitions involved tests of skill and fitness relevant to the rescue work. They came to be run in a quasi military style, embodying the Victorian manly sporting ideals of courage, endurance, loyalty, cooperation and patriotism. And also in keeping with these Victorian attitudes, women were constitutionally excluded from Surf Life Saving Association (SLSA) membership until 1979 (Pearson 1982a: 7-9).

> [T]he voices of all instructors readily take on sar'-major quality. Had to - it was anything but the easiest job in the world to turn a cocksure junior, bucked with himself because he'd got into a famous club ... into a perfectly functioning automaton concerned only with the efficiency of his squad as a unit (Maxwell 1949: 2-3).

But the organization of such a disciplined rescue service was at the expense of tension within the clubs. The hedonistic and rebellious roots of the organization were subordinated by an increasingly conservative administration. Pearson (1981) claims that a polarity had always existed within the clubs between play and the more instrumental objectives, but that the discrepancy increased in proportion to the organizations increased emphasis on the instrumental, while the value orientation of the broader culture was changing more towards the legitimation of hedonistic play.

This tension was manifest in conflicts over the use of surfboards. As far as the SLSA were concerned, any surf craft which was not used in rescue and competition was of no use to its members (Pearson 1982a: 10). Initial ambivalence about the value of the surfboard eventually turned to an outright antagonism which became the catalyst for a split in the organization. Setting the scene for this split were the same imperatives which consolidated the subculture in the USA post WW2:

> There was a big change in the manner of the [SLSA] members after the War. They were restless and hard to control ... It was something the clubs never recovered from, cars were becoming available and in 1948 petrol rationing was lifted ... Suddenly the youth were able to get mobile and were no longer anchored to the club. ... small groups of long plywood board riders were turning away from their home beaches to try other surfs nearby (Pioneer surfer in Pearson 1982a: 11).

In 1956 a group of lifeguards from California toured Australia, surfing from Avalon (North Sydney) to Torquay in Victoria; they were riding the new malibu surfboard. These boards were shaped from balsa wood and coated in fiberglass. They were lighter and shorter and, compared to the hollow plywood boards being used at the time, extremely maneuverable when riding waves. The demand for them overwhelmed the local surfboard manufacturers who couldn't get a reliable supply of balsa until 1958 (Young & McGregor 1983: 89). As Pearson (1981: 141-143) points out, the malibu brought tensions to a head within the SLSA which had simmered at least since the end of World War 2.

Informed by cult films imported by Australian enthusiasts from the United States, the American surfboard riding culture was adopted by those surfers who simply wanted to play. They became estranged from the officialdom of the clubs and stopped taking part in the beach patrols and competitions (Pearson 1982a: 12). In 1959, approximately 1,500 malibus were made, and by 1962 production had grown to 7,500 per year (Margan & Finney 1970: 282). By 1965 the SLSA's active membership was in decline and the malibu became the symbol of the organization's problems.

> [T]hus the seeds of revolution were sown ... board riding enthusiasts began to leave the Surf Life Saving Association in large numbers. Instead of realizing its mistake and making an effort to entice them back into the ranks the [SLSA] and its organizers withdrew further into their shells. By way of retribution, they banned the new boards from the clubs and used their influence with local councils to have

> them banned fully or partially from the beaches (in Pearson 1982a: 12-13).

As Booth (1994) points out, until the mid 1960s both the SLSA and the new surfing subculture made attempts to accommodate each other, but the contradictions between the two became irreconcilable as the subculture adopted its counter cultural form. The polarization which occurred led to numerous instances of conflict and sometimes physical violence between club members and surfers as the 'clubbies' endeavoured to enforce the SLSA's anti-malibu/anti-surfer regulations against the 'surfies'. Each became an 'out-group' for the other and two distinct philosophies and sports emerged as the conflict unified each in opposition to the other (Pearson 1982b). McGregor says that faced with the post war complexity of Australian society, the SLSA retreated into idiosyncrasy.

> Board riding is an intensely individualistic sport, whereas club surfing is a team effort. The board rider is flexible, untrammeled, moving from beach to beach in search of waves; the surf lifesaver joins a single club, gives his allegiance to a single beach, stays there while on duty. ... The one is cool, modern, uncommitted; the other is traditional, hidebound, loyalist (OUR CHIEF PATRON: His Royal Highness The Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh). One is self-involved, even selfish, one is aimed at service; one is free-wheeling, one is disciplined; one is with it, one is square (McGregor 1967: 285-286).

While the new surfing scene was initially supported by the mainstream, who saw the commercial potential in this latest ' teen fad', the conflicts, subversive attitudes and 'hooligan' antics of surfers became a cause for concern in the general population.

> Especially in the absence of formal institutions, surfing was an 'unanchored' cultural practice lacking social utility. The New South Wales Youth Policy Advisory Committee [1963] ... blamed misbehavior and delinquency on 'unattached' and 'unclubbable' young people. In mainstream discourse, surfers conjured up images of subversive 'itinerants', 'nomads' and 'wanderers' (Booth 1994: 268).

Along with the escalation of surfer hooliganism came problems with loose surfboards. When surfers took a fall while surfing at popular urban beaches their large and heavy surfboards could be swept through crowds of bathers. This resulted in several deaths and many injuries to the bathing public.

> Beach authorities, local government officials and the community at large set up an outcry that again further alienated the board rider,

> and when it was decided all over the world, to divide the beaches in many areas with one section for swimmers - the main part of the beach, and the fringe for the boards, the alienation became segregation (Margan & Finney 1970: 297).

As well as segregation, surfboards were being banned from some beaches; there were requirements to register surfboards, and film venues (usually town halls) were banning the screening of surf movies (the surfer's own variety, not the Hollywood version) due to 'near riots'. The Australian Surfrider's Association (ASA)[13] was formed in 1963 and became the parent body for the clubs located at urban beaches around the country. It aimed "... to regulate, codify and legitimize what they now defined as a sport" (Booth 1995: 190), and counter the bad publicity and ill feeling which had led to the Councils' anti-surfer regulations. The clubs held contests and attempted to improve surfing's image by portraying it as a healthy sport.

> In 1966, precisely at the same time as a municipal council confirmed bans and restrictions on surfers at beaches under its jurisdiction, councilors approved a civic reception for the new world surfing champion, Nat Young (Humphreys 1996: 8; see also Booth 1994).

This was a clear message from the parent culture; i.e. surfing is only acceptable as a rationalized sport.

But the ASA did not represent all or even a majority of surfers. "Surfing is finding yourself. There's no room for clubs. ... When you start organizing surfing, everybody peels off" (Nat Young in Margan & Finney 1970: 293).

> In Australia attempts to start clubs for board riders were marked with either failure or indifferent success ... the individualism and scorn for authority which gave bathing in the sea at Manly its start was again strong in the Australian youth (Margan & Finney 1970: 300-1).

As the 1960s progressed the emergent surfing subculture became enmeshed in the youth counter culture of that period, which further alienated surfers from mainstream society:

> The Longhaired, back-to-nature surf stars of the time were heavily involved in meditation, astrology, health foods, the self, the striving for physical perfection ... Taking psychedelic drugs and smoking marijuana became the norm. Surfers began dropping out and experimenting with communal living; everyone was trying to leave the city (Young & McGregor 1983: 110).

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[13] Called *Surfing Australia Inc.* since 1996.

Dropping out, taking drugs and finding yourself in communion with mother ocean, these were the elements of the counter culture era mediated in the cult surfing movies and magazines of the day;

> ...images of communal living, country farms, vegetarianism, ritualistic inhalation of the herb, yoga, meditation, and the majestic poetry of uncrowded light and space (Lovelock in Booth 1996:16).

Living on the dole was an acceptable option for many surfers in the 1970s, and as Nat Young had said "... by simply surfing we are supporting the revolution" (Booth 1995: 195).

For these 'soul surfers', as they became known, surfing was an art not a sport, and a way of life totally at odds with the processes of sportization which the new surfing bureaucracy promoted (Fiske 1987; McGregor 1967; Pearson 1979, etc.; Young & McGregor 1983). Pearson (1979) believed that surfing culture would not succumb to the pressure to athleticize because of its individualistic play orientation, and because it just wasn't necessary for participation. He claimed that there was a counter-reaction to this move to bring order to the surfing scene in Australia, and that most surfers rejected organization and competition:

> The tendencies towards athleticization of board riding were therefore inhibited by conscious actions of the participants themselves. In some cases the deliberate actions of board riders led to a destructuring of established activities (Pearson 1979: 193).

The clubs and their amateur competitive scene were a casualty of the counter culture ethos, which defined surfing as an art form rather than a sport, and rejected the commercialism and ordering involved in competitive surfing. It has been suggested that there were only two small 'strongholds' of competitive surfing in Australia at the time - the Gold Coast (Queensland) and North Narrabeen (Sydney) (Bartholomew & Baker 1996: 68). Driven mainly by the clubs that remained, and against the prevailing anti-competitive mood, professional surfing competitions got underway in the early 1970s and have become an integral part of the surfing subculture. The dialectic between the aesthetic orientation of the counter culture on the one hand, and the professionalization and sportization of surfing on the other, has remained a defining theme for surfing in Australia.

*Competitive Surfing in Australia*

Rather than a simple cleavage between opposing camps, the dialectic was (and remains) just as commonly manifest in an ambivalence towards competitive surfing in the attitude of individuals. Booth (1995: 197) claims that the counter culture and soul surfing were a short lived phenomenon which never totally subsumed the sport; "Ambivalence probably best summed up the attitudes of most competitors". But the fact that most *competitors* were ambivalent towards competitions is indicative of just how deeply the counter culture ethos was ingrained in the surfing subculture.

A professional surfer interviewed by Pearson (1979: 190) claimed that involvement in competition was hypocritical, and that "[w]e swallow our principles for money"; and from Nat Young (world champion competitor):

> Many young surfers today, I feel, are missing out on the possibility of expressing themselves through their surfing, or of getting closer in tune with nature, because their lives are dominated by contests (Young & McGregor 1983: 110).

Not only were many of the top surfers ambivalent, but the surfing media were hostile and at least one of the organizers and promoters of professional surfing was unsure of the direction they were heading;

> Deep in my subconscious I have this reluctance to be part of competitive surfing. I'm racked with these fears ... that what I'm doing is going to take away from surfing the virtues that first attracted me ... (in Booth 1995: 200).

There was also the reluctance of mainstream sponsors to be associated with surfing, but surfing's entrepreneurs successfully promoted a new clean image. Codes of conduct for both the new national and international professional surfing bodies required the pro surfers to "... project an image of authenticity and responsibility" (Booth 1995: 199).

Booth (1995: 200) says that the mainstream media embraced the new surfing image and increasingly professional surfing became a prominent part of sports news, and was even 'lauded' in 'respected financial magazines', including *Financial Review, Bulletin, Business Weekly, Australian Business*, and *Trade Marketing*. But what had facilitated this incorporation was the application of a veneer of respectability. As Wayne Bartholomew, one of the leading figures in the development of an international professional circuit recalls, the process entailed a difficult balancing act:

> We were trying to get the general public to take pro surfing seriously and believe we were serious athletes, and at the same time convince

> the hard-core that pro surfing wasn't a sell-out, and we were still rebellious surfers in the finest tradition (Bartholomew & Baker 1996: 127; confirmed in Carroll interview 1995).

This new image of respectability enabled an appropriation of a simulated, sanitized version of surfing culture by the mainstream. The process involved what Clarke et al. (1976: 188) describe as a 'defusion' of the subculture's oppositional character whereby "... the more 'acceptable' elements are stressed, and others de-stressed".

But just as the pro surfers were maintaining a respectable front for mainstream consumption, the mainstream itself maintained a similar front - suspending disbelief in order to appropriate and incorporate the 'goods' which came with the new package:

> The 1982 Surfabout competition, sponsored by Sydney Radio 2SM, owned by the Catholic church, and Coca Cola, suggests that surfing has now reached the ultimate in respectability. Surfers have been tamed, taught tricks, and now perform for the public on the world circuit. ... The 32 professional amphibians were in bed by eight o'clock, didn't smoke, pill-pop or waste precious energy on promiscuity. They lived on steamed vegies and milk and rang their mums every day or so (Lette 1982: 41-2 in *The Bulletin*).

The ambivalent relationship outlined above is indicative of the contradictions inherent in the transition to 'advanced capitalism'; while the traditionalists 'bewailed the crisis in authority' the progressives 'mercilessly exploited it' (Clarke et al. 1976: 65):

> Advanced capitalism now required not thrift but consumption; not sobriety but style; not postponed gratifications but immediate satisfaction of needs; not goods that last but things that are expendable: the swinging rather than the sober lifestyle. The gospel of work was hardly apposite to a life increasingly focussed on consumption, pleasure and play (Clarke et al. 1976: 64; see also Campbell 1987).

The first properly staged professional competition was held in Hawaii in 1969.

> [C]ompetitive surfing before that time had a wholesome, nearly Olympian air about it. The only commercial rewards were surfboards, occasional modeling fees and related equipment benefits given to surfers by surfboard and ocean wear manufacturers (Lueras 1984: 162).

**Plate 4**

Surf Life Saving Association (SLSA) of Australia carnival, circa 1964 (Margan & Finney 1970)

Nat Young typifies the counter cultural image of the surfer in the late 1960 and 1970s (Young 1999).

In Australia the first professional competition was sponsored by *Rip Curl* in 1973 at Bell's Beach, and in 1974 the Sydney radio station, *2SM*, and *Coca-Cola* sponsored the Surfabout with $3,000 as first prize. In 1975 the Australian Professional Surfing Association was formed to promote professional surfing, and in Hawaii a group called International Professional Surfers (IPS) was formed to develop an international professional rating system which would facilitate the establishment of a world pro circuit (Lueras 1984: 165; see also Booth 1995: 197-205). The pro circuit has developed over the years to the point where the top professionals can now make a good living and the circuit attracts substantial sponsorship deals and prize money.

While the tension between soul surfing and competition remained a vital force in the surfing subculture, the development of professional surfing stimulated a revival in the club scene in Australia. Regular club competitions provided the background training for a succession of professional world champions. Typically however, women competitors suffered inequitable treatment throughout these developments.

### *Australian Women in Surfing*

In 1915 Isabel Letham, a fifteen year old girl from Freshwater in Sydney, partnered Duke Kahanamoku in a tandem surfing display at the first surfboard riding exhibition held in Australia. From that time forward, as surfboard riding gained popularity, women were amongst those involved (Stell 1992). But right from the early days of the SLSA until 1979, the association discriminated against women by excluding them from membership, and until 1980 they were excluded from beach patrols and rescues (Pearson 1982b: 128). While they did participate in club activities and even held their own competitions, their status within the clubs was always subordinate to that of the men. As one woman who had been involved in lifesaving since the early 1940s recalls: "They liked us there to raise money and feed them" (Smith 1997). The association justified its discrimination on the grounds of male physical superiority. The following extract from the *Bondi Surfer*, April 1953, sums up this attitude:

> Perhaps, the whole question was settled a long, long time ago by the Creator when he fashioned Adam. He designed him to fit into a surf belt, to take the strain and bashing about that he would get in fighting out and dragging a heavy line through the surf, and then

> taking the entire strain of the pull back to the shore of himself and patient (or patients), the whole of this to be on his chest. Can anyone suggest that He designed Eve to take the same punishment? (in Pearson 1982b: 128).

With the revolt against the SLSA in the early 1960s there was an opportunity for women to participate fully in the new surfing culture. The popular 1959 Hollywood film *Gidget* provided a role model for the most diminutive of teenage girls to play an active part in the sport of surfboard riding. In the early days of the 1960s surfing boom it has been suggested that, at least in some prominent surfing areas, women constituted between 20 and 50 percent of the surfing population (Lynch and Farrelly interviews 1995).

As numbers of surfers increased rapidly throughout the 1960s the resulting aggression in the surf, as surfers fought for waves (literally sometimes), drove many women away from active participation in the sport (Austen and Lynch interviews 1995; see also Stell 1992).

> Phyllis O'Donnel [World Champion, 1964) ... had to scream and swear like a man to get her share of the waves. When women went into the water they ... either had to behave like a bloke or get out. I got punched in the back (Austen interview 1995).

From the mid-to late 1960s onwards, most women in the surfing scene did not surf. These non-surfing women were mainly sisters, partners/girlfriends, friends of girlfriends and 'unattached' friends of surfing males. Stedman (1997: 82) claims that surfing's counter culture era involved a "... critique of hegemonic masculinity ...", but this critique provided only a very limited form of liberation from mainstream gender expectations, involving sexual freedom linked to participation in an alternative malecentric lifestyle.

The media have been blamed for sexism and misogyny, and for not providing images of women as surfers and thereby denying women "... access to the symbolic community of surfers as a basis for their own identities" (Stedman 1997: 83; see also Versace 1993 and Stell 1992)[14]. It is not simply that the media did not portray women as surfers but that they reinforced a stereotypical, passive role for women:

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[14] For more general discussion of women, sport and the media see Creedon (1994); McKay, J. (1986); Segal (1997); Wearing (1996); and Williams et al. (1986).

> I think [magazines] tend to portray women as bimbo-ish in a way. Then again, a lot of surfie girls do act like bimbos, don't they? My girlfriends who want to be a part of the scene act bimbo-ish because that is part of the image (young woman in Versace 1993: 27).

In her surfing column in the *Geelong Advertiser* (February 7, 1970), Gail Couper (prominent Australian competitor from 1964 - 1980) complained about the poor treatment women surfers were getting:

> Foremost would be the attitudes taken by Australian surfing magazines which generally tend to rubbish women surfers. ... They dismiss the women's events at contests with hardly a mention. ... If they bother to comment it is usually to complain that good surfing conditions are wasted during the time occupied by the women's events (in Faye 1999: 8).

By the 1980s the surfing scene was not only dominated by males it was becoming a haven for sexist behaviour, and editorials in opposition to mainstream demands for gender equality were common in surfing magazines (Stedman 1997). The same level of inequity has been evident in the realm of competitive surfing (Stell 1992).

Women have been involved in surfing competitions in Australia since the early 1960s, and when Midget Farrelly won the inaugural *men's* world surfing championships at Manly in 1964, Phyllis O'Donnell, a fellow Australian, won the *women's* world title. While Farrelly became a household name, with his own nationally broadcast television show, O'Donnell's achievement was completely overshadowed by the male victory. The lack of recognition she received was typical of the time, but it was also an indication of things to come.

As was the case generally in the surfing subculture, women were treated badly by the ASA. "In competition women got the worst conditions and they let the cadets judge them" (Austen interview 1995). In 1978, as a result of their poor treatment, a group of women (lead by Gail Austen) formed the Australian Women's Surfing Association (AWSA), and held their own competitions (Pearson 1982b; Stell 1992). The ASA made overtures to get the women to rejoin, guaranteeing them representation on decision-making bodies, and in 1982 the AWSA disbanded (Stell 1992). But this was not the end of the inequities.

The disparity in prize money remained a source of dissension. In the 1984/5 season, for example, the women had a total prize pool of $56,100 compared to the men's $500,000. Stell (1992: 103) notes that in the first

tournament of this season it would have been more profitable to have won the bikini contest than the women's surfing event. Alan Atkins, Executive Director of *Surfing Australia Inc.*, pointed out that although the total prize money available is less there are fewer women competing for it, and so professional women are probably financially better off than their male counterparts in regards to prize money. He gave the example of a recent international competition where six women competed for a total of $6000 while 64 men competed for a total of $14000 (Atkins interview 1995). The same argument was put by Rod Brooks, President of *Surfing Australia Inc* and *Quiksilver International* (Australia) (Brooks interview 1995).

Male professionals complained that the women were not up to their standard and there were moves by the men to get the women's events removed from the professional circuit as late as 1991. The men resented being forced to share limited sponsorship dollars with the women (Burridge interview 1995; and Stell 1992). Besides the animosity of their male counterparts, there were two other major problems faced by women wishing to become professional surfers; first, the reluctance of the surfing industry to sponsor them: "The big surfing companies ... said sponsoring women was not their policy" (Pam Burridge, 1990 World Champion, in Stell 1992: 182); and second, poor representation in the surfing media of women as surfers (Stell 1992; and Stedman 1997). On a practical level this created a cycle which competitive women surfers found difficult to overcome. Without media coverage it was impossible to argue for industry sponsorship and without sponsorship they could not travel to competitions and top surfing locations where media coverage was at least possible. Without surf industry sponsorship they had to find other means of raising money, which usually meant less time in the surf and so their surfing suffered and their chance of media coverage was further diminished. In her study of surfing culture, Versace (1993) argues that with far fewer women surfers on the professional circuit than the men, surfing at a lower standard than the men, the result was inevitably less media coverage.

*Section Summary*

Even in pre-colonial times the surfers of Hawaii appear to have dealt with the tensions between their love of surfing (abandoning responsibilities when the surf is good) and its rationalization (the political and spiritual

aspects). Whether they had achieved the kind of balance between the Apollonian and Dionysian modes which Nietzsche prescribes, we can only speculate (Turner 1996: 19). Nevertheless, the introduction of colonial rule and the ascendancy of a western Apollonian mode saw an end to the rich ancient surfing aesthetic.

The modern renaissance of surfing was a product of the kind of commodification which would later become the hallmark of postmodernization; the simulation of a culture which no longer existed, based on its reconstruction in the media. In Baudrillard's (1988b) terms, pure simulacra. This link between commodification and aestheticization will continue to be of significance in my analysis of surfing's postmodern development.

Initially surfing became assimilated into the US mainstream as another modern leisure pursuit; a reward for hard work and a worthwhile activity associated with self sacrifice, heroism and the ideals of 'muscular Christianity'. This modern Apollonian mode was disrupted by the upheavals of World War 2 (in both the USA and Australia) in what might be, to some extent, described as an early manifestation of postmodern disaffection with the promise of modernity; i.e. a Dionysian turn in response to the spectacular failure of the modern sociopolitical system to avoid the chaos of global war.

The dynamic between the Apollonian and Dionysian modes appears to be even more marked in the Australian experience than in the United States. The struggle to play in the ocean was won only to be regulated by the very organizations which emerged out of the fight for that freedom - the surf lifesaving clubs. The tension which this created between what Schiller (1982) describes as our 'sense-drive' and 'form-drive' (the former an aesthetic motivation and the latter a drive to order), was such that a split occurred creating, momentarily at least, separate Dionysian and Apollonian surfing cultures. I say momentarily because it wasn't long before the form-drive began to emerge within the new Dionysian surfboard riding scene[15].

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[15] Similarly, the Dionysian mode has found a greater influence within the surf lifesaving culture. In many areas the rescue duties are now undertaken by professional lifeguards and the clubs focus on competition and social activities.

This sport/art dialectic emerged as a defining characteristic of the culture during this period, although the manifestation of Apollo and Dionysius are not as clearly defined as their previous Australian surfing forms; even the surfers involved in the development of the professional circuit expressed concern over what it might do to surfing.

While women appeared to have played an active role in the early stages of both the main Dionysian turns in Australia's surfing history (free bathing and surfboard riding), the subsequent ordering of these new lifeworlds resulted in substantial inequities and a return to passive roles and subordinate status. But despite the antagonism and discrimination shown towards women surfers their numbers continued to increase. Ironically the media, which had been so instrumental in excluding women as surfers, ended up contributing to the deconstruction of gender within the surfing lifeworld.

Today more than ever, surfing culture draws on its history for the creation of legends and myths with many of modern surfing's legends approaching late middle age and beyond. Ancient history too continues to provide a resource for myth making as the subculture busily constructs its traditions and cultural trappings from that particular archive. In true postmodern style this process is mediated through commodification in the surfing media, as part of the surfing culture industry (see Chapter 7).

With a view to the dialectic between play and order, which has so defined surfing's past, the next section addresses the character of the current surfing subculture.

## Contemporary Surfing Life

In this section I provide an overview of contemporary surfing in Australia, with an analytic focus on the nature of the subculture and its relationship with its parent culture. This examination provides evidence of the complexity of the relationship and the dialectical nature of the dynamics between resistance and incorporation (a contemporary manifestation of the play/order dialectic).

I first discuss the subcultural framework used to analyze contemporary surfing, before describing some of the main structural features of the subculture. I then present some of the current developments affecting contemporary surfing life[16].

*Surfing Subculture*

The use of the concept of subculture in this thesis is problematic in two related ways; first, it is claimed that surfing is no longer distinct from the mainstream; and second, the concept is said to have lost its heuristic value in postmodernity.

Some claim that the oppositional nature of surfing has been substantially lost through the process of incorporation into the mainstream (Booth 1995; Scures 1986; & Donnelly 1988).

> ...surfing and freestyle skiing appeared to lose what little oppositional content they may have once had as they developed the trappings of modern rationalized sport (e.g., sponsorship, organized competitions, governing bodies, officials, prizes, media coverage, etc.) (Donnelly 1988: 74).

Others, like Fiske et al. (1987), Flynn (1987), and Pearson (1978; 1979; 1981; 1982a; & 1982b) maintain that despite attempts by the dominant culture to incorporate surfing, the notion of a surfing subculture remains valid;

> The surfer in Australia has articulated and developed the most coherent and continuous discourse of opposition to the dominant, and is unique amongst the subcultures of youth (Fiske et al. 1987: 66).

Current social theory is typically ambivalent about the concept of subculture. The counter culture type - which characterized surfing's formative subcultural years in Australia - is said to have been at least proto-postmodern (Lash 1990; Kumar 1995) and for Beck (1992) subcultures are a major component of contemporary society. A suggestion that the concept has become redundant stems from the recognition of social fragmentation and transitory social interaction inherent in postmodernity; "The concept retains too much of the idea of culture as a way of life, as something one lives within"(Crook et al. 1992: 72).

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[16] Two important sectors of the subculture are not addressed in this section - the surfing culture industry and competitive surfing - both these areas have chapters dedicated to them later in the thesis.

The other half of the problem, which Crook et al. (1992) also draw attention to, is whether there is a dominant culture which surfing can be said to be subordinate or in opposition to:

> It is not simply the replacement of a few fully integrated cultural unities by many, but the erosion of the fully integrated cultural unity as such (Crook et al. 1992: 72).

Consequently simple 'contests' of resistance and conformity between the hegemonic and the subordinate are no longer clear cut (Crook et al. 1992: 72). Similarly Bauman (1992: 35) says that in the postmodern context concepts like 'dominant culture' and 'cultural hegemony' are losing their meaning, and multiple cultures simply 'coexist' "... resisting ordering along axiological or temporal axes". For Cohen and Taylor's (1992: 2-4) 'escapees' the problem postmodernity poses is that there is no 'paramount reality' to escape from.

Based on an extensive study of Australian surfing media, Stedman (1997) argues that the postmodern nature of surfing is such that;

> ...the subculture as an observable entity is now virtually non-existent. ... the process of editorial selection in surf magazines is not the distortion of 'reality' but the creation of it (Stedman 1997: 76).

I argue that Stedman's conclusions reflect the limited focus of the research. Contrary to Stedman (1997) I have found that dynamic surfing communities exist in locations all around the country. Although, as expected defining these communities as a part of a subculture distinct from its parent culture remains problematic.

I suggest though, that the problem is adequately addressed through a cultural studies approach to subcultural analysis. This framework recognizes that the boundaries of a subculture may be very loose; i.e. there is common ground across the culture, but local manifestations can differ markedly from each other, including their relationships with the dominant/parent culture. Further, social interaction is not considered a necessary feature of the subculture (Donnelly 1988 & 1993; Clarke et al. 1976; & Pearson 1978 & 1981).

> Some sub-cultures are merely loosely-defined strands or 'milieux' within the parent culture: they possess no distinctive 'world' of their own (Clarke et al. 1976: 14).

By adopting a Gramscian interpretation of hegemony the dynamic between resistance and incorporation can be seen as taking place in an arena not unlike the postmodern realm of disorder and fluidity.

> [Hegemony] has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own (in Donnelly 1988: 69).

Clarke et al. (1976: 69) argue that the counter cultural forms of youth subcultures are particularly significant as 'emergent social forms'; providing models for processes of change within the parent culture. But the manner in which they facilitate change is complex, as Thompson points out:

> They [the subcultures] may, for long periods, coexist with it [the parent culture], negotiate the spaces and gaps in it, make inroads into it "warrening it from within" (in Clarke et al. 1976: 12).

As Clarke et al. (1976) point out, the disruption caused by the counter culture set in motion significant cultural change:

> It cracked the mould of the dominant culture ... [and w]hen the codes of traditional culture are broken, and new social impulses are set free, they are impossible fully to contain (Clarke et al. 1976: 67).

Without committing myself to any broader cultural studies position (see Rojek 1993: 204-9 for a critique of this approach to leisure), I draw on the cultural studies model outlined above for my analysis of contemporary surfing in Australia; i.e. surfing subculture as a postmodern 'emergent social form', and the parent culture[17] as a dynamic hegemonic culture arrived at through ongoing struggles with competing cultures, both emergent and residual. The overarching context in which these struggles are occurring is that of postmodernization.

The use of the terms 'the surfing subculture' and 'the surfing aesthetic' or 'global surfing aesthetic' in this thesis needs some further qualification, as I do not intend to give the impression that surfing is an homogenous culture. There are many factions and sectors within the subculture, some of which are quite antagonistic towards each other and have reasonably differentiated aesthetics and even specific media. However, as will become clear in subsequent chapters, this diversity is accommodated within the broader subculture through a shared knowledge of ecstatic

[17] I use the term 'parent culture' or 'mainstream' throughout this thesis in preference to 'dominant culture' because in the current environment the concept of dominance is problematic.

experience in the bodily practice of surfing, and an overarching surfing aesthetic which recognizes the sublime in the awesome power and beauty of the ocean's waves. This concept is captured (and commodified) in a surfing industry slogan 'Only a surfer knows the feeling'; it is in this broad context that I use these unifying terms.

*Class and Surfing*

One important deviation from Clarke et al.'s (1976: 60-3) model of subcultures is in the distinction they make between counter cultures as a middle class subset of working class subcultures (see also McGuigan 1992: 92-7). In this study I found no evidence of any class basis for full participation as a surfer (see Fig. J, Chapter 5), and this confirms what Pearson's (1979 & 1982b) study of Australian surfing found.

Characteristics which Clarke et al. (1976) used to differentiate between working class and middle class subcultures are found coexisting as aspects of surfing culture. For example, the hooliganism outlined in the previous section is typical of the oppositional behaviour of Clarke et al.'s working class subcultures, while the cultural production which led Donnelly (1993: 137) to describe surfing as an 'emergent culture' is described by Clarke et al. as a characteristic of the counter culture. It may be possible to isolate these behavioral types to some degree to specific subgroups within the subculture; e.g. surfboard riding clubs were sites of typically working class hooliganism, while certain rural locations were counter culture enclaves. However it is not possible to claim that the populations of either of these sites were or are differentiated along class lines. One club member questioned for this study was a cardio-thorasic surgeon, and rural surf beaches are certainly not dominated by middle class surfers. Further, I have observed that these two behaviour types are commonly displayed in various mixes within any one group.

While the surfing subculture and the emergence of its counter culture form may have had middle class beginnings, the counter culture's influence on surfing was to dedifferentiate the classes within the subculture. Dropping out and going on the dole dismantled the barriers of privilege between classes (at least temporarily) and the alternative lifestyles which were being adopted by surfers valued highly the traditional manual skills of working class surfers (e.g. DIY mechanics,

carpentry, and growing vegetables). By engaging with this subculture working class surfers were stepping outside the 'modern' framework which Clarke et al. (1976) had defined:

> Working-class subcultures reproduce a clear dichotomy between those of group life still fully under the constraints of dominant or 'parent' institutions (family, home, school, work), and those focussed on non-work hours - leisure, peer-group associations. Middle-class counter-culture milieux merge and blur the distinctions between 'necessary' and 'free' time and activities (Clarke et al. 1976: 60).

The loose structure Clarke et al. (1976) associated with the counter culture remains the dominant social framework for contemporary surfers. And the distinction between work-time and leisure-time is as blurred for working class surfers as it is for middle class surfers. Schwendinger and Schwendinger's (1997) study of subcultures in the United States (which included surfing) is consistent with my analysis of the Australian scene:

> Social-class processes appeared to influence the cultural parameters and relative magnitudes of the subcultures but they also cultivated these subcultures among youth in all classes (Schwendinger & Schwendinger 1997: 73).

They noted that 'surfer networks' were among those which often played an intermediary role between social class networks.

The blurring of class boundaries has developed through the subculture's connection with the counter culture. This is an example of the active production of cultural forms consistent with the notion of the surfing subculture as an agent of postmodernization. It supports Lash's (1990: 18 - 30) suggestion that postmodern subcultures 'de-center' working class youth, and is consistent with Beck's (1992: 88) notion of contemporary subcultures as unattached to class and other social stratifications.

***Structural Elements of the Contemporary Subculture***

The following outline of the subculture's loose social structure is developed more fully in the following chapter where I examine the topic at the level of the individual and various sub-structures. Here I provide a macro level overview of the subculture and discuss significant trends and the variety of modes in which people experience contemporary surfing life.

As a result of influences both from within the subculture and from the dominant parent culture associated with the professionalization of the sport, the level of mainstream acceptance of surfing as a 'legitimate' sport has increased (Booth 1995: 200-5). In the early 1990s the then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, had publicity photographs taken walking along a beach with world champion, Tom Carroll. Government funding has been made available for coaching clinics and a surfing museum; a grand prix pro circuit attracts large amounts of mainstream sponsorship; the mainstream media covers Pro surfing; in 1995 surfing was accepted as a probationary Olympic sport; and surfers receive mainstream sporting awards and other sporting accolades. Surfing 'boutiques' can be found in shopping malls and country towns all over Australia - even Alice Springs - selling the 'symbolic tokens' of the idealized hedonistic surfing life to tourists and the general public of all ages. Famous surfing spots like Bells Beach and Margaret River are a part of tourist bus itineraries where tourists are invited to view the surfers in action, take photographs and read the plaques in memory of surfers who have died in the treacherous seas there.

Some local governments now proudly announce their links with surfing, through the use of surfing photos in their tourist brochures and billboards and in their lists of sporting attractions. The shire council servicing the town of Torquay now calls itself the *Surf Coast Shire* and the tourist radio for the Margaret River area declares that the new prosperity in the region is due to surfing and wine making. That particular council has a surfing advisory committee and the Conservation And Land Management (CALM) area map shows the location of most of the popular surfing locations with the names given to them by surfers; like *The Womb, Grunters* and *The Guillotine* .

Even the antagonism between the SLSA and surfers has all but disappeared in many areas with their diminishing lifesaving role (replaced by professional lifeguards in many areas) and the processes of 'sportization' within both cultures leading to less conflict and more common ground. In fact some joint lifesaving/surfing contests have been held, and at the 1995 Rip Curl/Quit Pro contest some of the SLSA's elite 'Iron Men' competed against professional surfers in a paddling race. Surfers who were once 'sworn enemies' of the clubbies now send their

children to the SLSA to learn about safety in the surf and first aid. The main area of competition with surf lifesaving now is over sponsorship dollars and media coverage of their respective sporting events (Reid interview 1995).

A surfer's orientation towards leisure rather than work as the main focus of identity was once considered deviant. Today it is an option accepted widely and taken up by many as the distinction between work and leisure blurs, the world of work itself becomes fragmented and unstable, and the aestheticization of everyday life brings a new perspective on career and lifestyle choices. The attitude to work, drug taking, tastes in music and dress, sexual promiscuity and wild parties, were among the oppositional elements which helped define the early surfing subculture. Today they are merely options in the postmodernizing mainstream. At the same time the options for surfers themselves have expanded, and the variety of lifestyles led by dedicated surfers is as varied as those of the local populations in which they live. The only certain method of determining whether a person is a surfer or not is to find out whether they go surfing.

While it is impossible to define the contemporary surfing subculture in terms of any particular lifestyle, following Clarke et al. (1976) (below), it is still distinguishable as a subculture:

> [Subcultures] must be focussed around certain activities, values, certain artefacts, territorial spaces etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture (Clarke et al. 1976: 13).

Underpinning the surfing subculture is a shared knowledge of the thrill of surfing (this is a profoundly important factor in the resilience of this social form and will be given the consideration it deserves in the following chapter) and the subculture displays all the structural characteristics Clarke et al. (1976) prescribe.

Surfers are people with a particular orientation, a particular set of priorities; their lifestyles are constructed around maximizing access to the surf, and a defining theme for surfers themselves is the level of commitment to this prioritization. It is arguably the case that a surfer's level of commitment is as important an indication of status within the subculture as their courage and ability (Ortiz 1979; Scures 1986). Besides

the status structure of its members, there are three other main structural factors which define the surfing subculture[18];

i) 'core' and 'hardcore' surfers;

ii) sustaining myths and legends; and

iii) 'sacred sites'.

These three are manifest on global, national and local levels.

*Surfer Types*

While the definition of a hardcore surfer will vary within the surfing culture, broadly speaking, hardcore surfers are those whose level of commitment to surfing is such that they orient their lives around swell predictions, tide charts and wind directions; work, family, health, relationships, and other commitments are subordinate to maximizing surf time. This is the case not only for the hardcore soul surfers, but also for many professionals who actively cultivate a hardcore image (Carroll interview 1995; also Bartholomew & Baker 1996). It is the hardcore surfers who maintain and continually reinvent the oppositional nature of the subculture.

Unemployment benefits are still an option for the hardcore surfers although a life on the dole is no longer the ideal it once was (Booth 1995), as 'partying hard', surfing equipment and travel to the sacred sites of surfing are all expensive. Unemployment benefits are more commonly a stop-gap between the part-time casual work preferred by the often itinerant hardcore.

One step removed from the hardcore are those I will call 'core' surfers. These are the committed rank and file surfers whose opposition to the mainstream may not be so overt but whose lives are largely oriented towards going surfing as often as possible. The core still maintain a level of commitment to central mainstream values attached to family, career etc. while the locus of their paramount identity is within the surfing culture. These surfers often choose to commute reasonably long distances to work in order to live by the sea, and their pre-dawn surf checks will influence whether they actually make it to work or not[19]. The core surfers' choice of

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[18] In the following chapter I continue the examination of the subculture's social structure and develop a typology of social configurations.

[19] In Torquay, for example, the car parks at the numerous surfing spots in and around the town had a steady stream of traffic moving through them each weekday morning as surfers who lived in the

work is often made with a view to the level of freedom it might provide for taking time off when the surf is at its best. The core endeavour to maximize their surfing time while still at least giving consideration to other commitments - which they endeavour to keep to a minimum[20].

A third category is the 'recreational' surfer. The term is often used by those involved in the sportization of surfing to differentiate between competition oriented surfers and the rest - who only surf for 'fun'. This dichotomy is misleading however as it implies that non-competitive core surfers (including hardcore - see footnote below) have a lower level of commitment than competitive surfers, and therefore lower status. For the purposes of this study a recreational surfer is one who goes surfing when he or she has some spare time from their other commitments and who either uses surfing as a leisure break from the serious business of their modern working life, or as just one of a range of activities which constitute a more fragmented postmodern lifestyle . Recreational surfers colonise the common ground between the mainstream and the surfing subculture. Surfing for them is a bit of fun to be had when the weather is good and the surf is not too challenging. Their paramount identities may well be situated outside the surfing subculture; although they may also draw on the surfing style as a means of identity construction.

The 'pseudo-surfer' (Irwin 1973) is not really a surfer type but someone who adopts a surfing identity (usually temporarily) through the purchase of 'symbolic tokens' available as part of the postmodern archive of styles (Bauman 1992; Crook et al. 1992). While the pseudo-surfer may well play in the surf occasionally, their identity is not attached in any meaningful way to the bodily practice of surfing, which is the foundational basis of the surfing subculture and an essential criterion of subculture membership[21] . The pseudo surfer therefore occupies a position outside the subculture.

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town but work in Melbourne (approx. 100 km away) conducted their pre-dawn surf checks before beginning their journey - or not (Fieldnotes 1995).

[20] NOTE: From now on, unless I specifically differentiate between core and hardcore types, whenever I use the term 'core surfers' I intend to include both core and hardcore types.

[21] Partners of surfers and other non-surfing 'available' women, and perhaps men (I have no evidence of men in this role), may also be considered as members but this is really a kind of associate membership as they cannot truly participate in the *conscience collectif* that underpins the subculture (more will be said about this in the following chapter).

The boundaries between these ideal types are blurry and individuals can move in and out of all of them during their surfing careers. Although while the pseudo-surfer can become a recreational surfer and so forth, a return to pseudo status would be problematic if the *experience* of surfing became a motivating factor.

The hardcore maintain the oppositional, counter cultural resistance to the dominant culture. The core surfers also maintain a subcultural identity whilst engaging more with the dominant culture. Both these two types can be seen as engaging in the production of an emergent postmodern culture. Recreational surfers and pseudo-surfers occupy the border regions between the dominant culture and the subculture with the recreational surfer interacting with the subculture while the pseudo-surfer merely appropriates the commodified symbols. While pseudo-surfers can be described as a postmodern phenomenon, recreational surfers are more problematic; they could represent the residual, modern, dominant culture (e.g. differentiated work and leisure; rationalized sport) but they could just as easily represent the kind of postmodern longing for 'real' experience which Baudrillard (1988b) described. Either way, because of their predominantly mainstream lives they act as agents of postmodernization, as 'carriers'[22] of aestheticization through their exposure to the subculture which presents an alternative to the dominant.

*Myths and Legends*

Perhaps the most pervasive myth involves the search for the perfect wave. It emerged from the tales of discovery of the early modern surfers and spread through the surfing media; most especially the early cult movies which documented/simulated voyages of discovery around the world. Today the commodification of the myth is complete with video's like *Rip Curl's* 'The Search' and *Quiksilver's* 'Surfers of Fortune' being used as marketing themes, employing elite 'soul surfers' to travel to exotic locations and be filmed living the myth[23]. Warm weather and a warm sea, a light offshore breeze and good waves at a secret or isolated location, shared with only a few friends; these are ideals now shared by surfers the world over, whether their home base is in Scotland or Hawaii.

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[22] 'Carrier' as in a carrier of disease.

[23] *Rip Curl* and *Quiksilver* are two of Australia's top 'authentic' surfing labels. 'Soul Surfers' are those who are opposed to the sportization of surfing.

National and local myths evolve around large swells, sharks, treacherous surfing locations and of course legends evolve around those whose courage, skill and commitment enabled them to surf in the face of these dangers. The surfing media concentrates on the exploits of the elite professional surfers (all sponsored by their major advertisers) and so at the national and global level it is the elite who become the focus of myth and legend making. But it is not simply competition success which makes a legend here; just as courage and skill in dangerous situations is the basis of legends at the local level, it is also an essential ingredient when it comes to the status of the professional elite. In fact top ranking competitors will be derided in the surfing media if they have not proven themselves in large and dangerous surf.

*Sacred Sites*

There are significant surfing sites recognized by the surfing subculture and the parent culture, because of major surfing competitions held there - like Bells Beach in Victoria - or because of spectacular risk-taking behaviour - like the Pipeline in Hawaii - or simply because of their attraction for tourists - like Surfer's Paradise. The internationally significant sites like Hawaii attract large numbers of surfers on surfing 'pilgrimages' each season, and on a national scale sites like Bells Beach also attract many travelling surfers for the prestige or self satisfaction of having surfed there. Local significant sites function in a similar way, and surfing them can be part of status acquisition. The accumulation of cultural capital is associated with surfing any of these sites.

But there are other significant locations, which I call 'sacred sites', that those outside the subculture know little or nothing about (Plate 5). These sites all require a high level of commitment (even sacrifice) on behalf of surfers; they may require considerable travel, they may be isolated and without facilities, and typically, while the surf is potentially excellent, it is also potentially dangerous. Two such sites were visited in the course of this study; both desert locations with no running water, no power, populated by deadly snakes and sharks and both around 2 hours drive from the nearest basic medical facilities. The waves at these sites were powerful and dangerous, braking on shallow reefs, and requiring high skill levels; their shape was perfect for the experienced surfer.

The ascetic lifestyle lead by those who visit these sites is based around surfing as many hours a day as the body can take. The rest of the time is spent on survival chores such as fishing, gathering firewood, repairing surfboards or camping equipment and the occasional trip for water and other supplies. The evenings are typically spent in small groups around campfires talking about the day's surf or other surfing experiences, drinking, sharing a joint, and listening to music; with the occasional party bringing larger groups together.

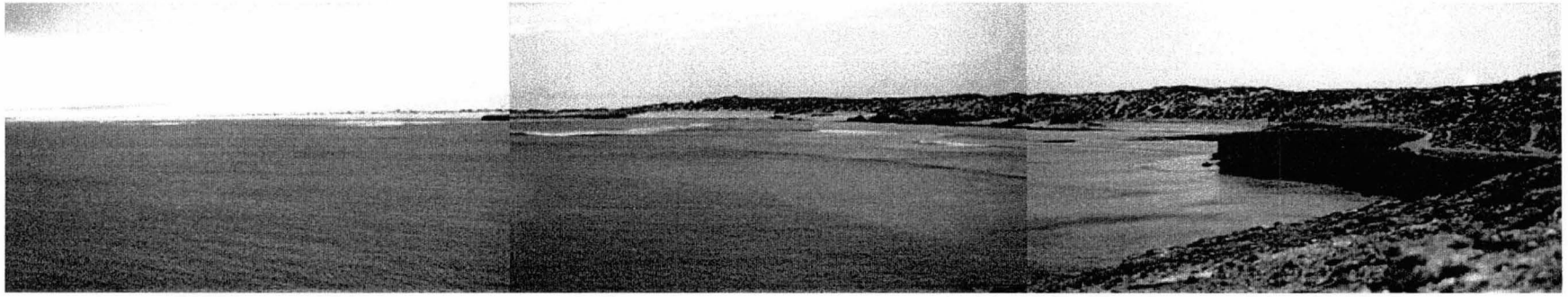
> The difference between this community and any other alternative lifestyle is that everybody here spends 90% of their time tuned to the surf. They do what they have to do to survive and rest up for the surf (Blue* interview 1995).

The intense nature of the surfing experience and the shared focus of the surfers is such that *conscience collectif* is high and tribal metaphors seem entirely appropriate.

In one of these locations the surfers left their surfboards and wetsuits where the surf break was and walked up to a kilometre to and from their camp sites. In the 14 years the caretaker had lived on the site there had only been one surfboard stolen (Peter* interview 1995). These surfboards were treated like highly prized weapons; the 'warriors' cared for them, displayed them and talked about their designs and performance together, then took them into 'mimetic' battle (Elias & Dunning 1986). The women partners of these surfers mostly cooked and tended children while the men, apart from contributing to the chores mentioned above, just surfed and fished. Very few women surf at these places but those I witnessed surfing were treated as fellow warriors.

People usually come to these sites for at least a week or two - apart from the few that live within commuting distance - and it is common for people to stay several months and sometimes years (Peter* interview 1995). The people I encountered at these sites ranged from teachers, an IT consultant,

**Plate 5**



Cactus, on the edge of the Great Australian Bight. Remote; dangerous sharks and snakes; no drinkable water or electricity; legendary surf; sacred site.

and a lawyer - all on annual leave - to the novelist working on his next book, to the seasonal workers who spend all their off season time at such locations, to the carpenter who works hard for four months each year and lives as a travelling surfer for the rest of the time. None of the people I interviewed at these sites were actually on the dole at the time. Young families were also common and in fact the only obvious sectors missing were surfers under 20 and over 50 years of age.

While the hardcore maintain the oppositional culture traditions through their lifestyles, these sites also contribute to this process by providing the opportunity for all core surfers to live the myths which underpin their diverse surfing lifestyles. As sites like these become overcrowded and commodified through media attention and surfing tourism (as they have in the past) the search expands to other isolated coastlines, remote islands, and outer reefs in order to provide the escape and the experience, to fuel and create the myths and the legends of the surfing subculture.

*Overcrowding*

According to a surfboard manufacturer with nearly 30 years experience, on average, core surfers buy a new surfboard every year (Fieldnotes 1995). With approximately 80,000 surfboards being produced in Australia for the domestic market each year (Brooks & Atkins 1993: 24) we can assume a core surfing population around that figure (the small percentage of these boards sold to recreational surfers can reasonably be expected to be countered by the number of second hand boards purchased by young core surfers and neophytes). According to *Surfing Australia Inc.* (1996: 5), approximately 2.16 million Australians surf (this figure covers the occasional recreational body surfer right through to the full time hardcore).

Overcrowding is a major problem at urban beaches and can occasionally result in violent confrontation between surfers. An aggressive territorialism, known to surfers as 'localism', has emerged at many urban beaches and surfers from outside the local area can face harassment and verbal and physical abuse. The surf trip is a regular part of many urban surfers' weekends and holidays as they escape their overcrowded beaches and create new crowds at locations in country areas. The problems caused by weekend crowds migrating from the cities is exacerbated when

highly competitive and aggressive urban surfers disturb the more laid back country ambience or when visitors simply fail to recognize the protocols peculiar to different locations. As a result localism can become a problem in these areas as well. Fear of litigation and perhaps just the ageing surfing population have meant that the violent localism of the 1970s and early 1980s has been curbed to some degree:

> You get the odd argument and fist fight out in the water; especially when the big cyclone swells are running and [the break] is at its best. ... During the 70s tyres were slashed and boards smashed of outsiders who didn't show proper respect. It was good to see, but today you can't have a punch up and then have a beer at the end of the day - you get sued; so it doesn't happen anymore (Reid Interview 1995).

But while the systematic violence may have abated, the problem of overcrowding has continued to increase[24] (Tullemans 1997). At the most heavily populated sites instances of violence more akin to 'road rage' are now becoming a common feature:

> In Perth, there is approval for the construction of an artificial reef. ... It's a response to the 80 convictions of assault on record at Warwick Police Station arising from the overcrowding of ... Trigg Point. That's three major biff-ups every two weeks from crew losing it over waves (Tullemans 1997: 46).

Surfing has managed to avoid regulation since the backdown by local governments over board registration in the 1960s. There is an etiquette recognized globally which states that the surfer who catches a wave closest to the breaking part of that wave has the right to surf it alone. Anybody who takes off on a wave in front of the person with the 'right of wave' is said to be 'dropping in'. The sanctions applied to the offending surfer range from disapproving looks to physical violence. In crowded surf the difficulty of getting a wave leads to frustration and inevitably more surfers drop in and as tempers rise reactions become more extreme.

The consequences of this level of overcrowding go beyond a loss of enjoyment and camaraderie. While the construction of artificial reefs and wave pools presents an opportunity for mainstream regulation and commodification - including fees and time limitations - the prospect of

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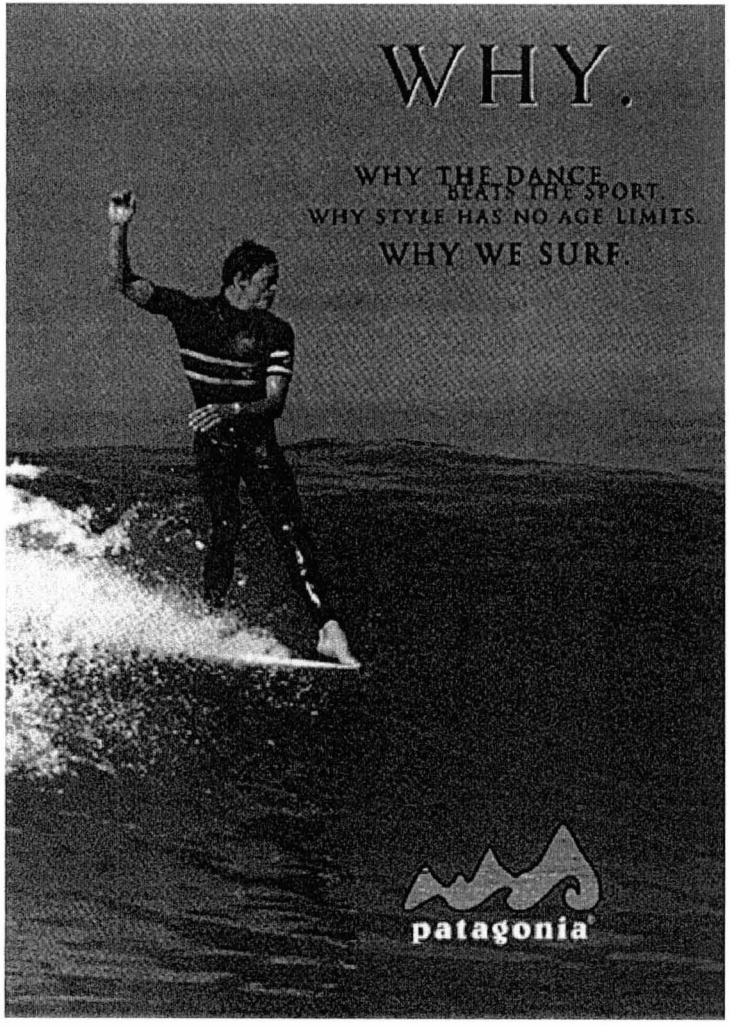
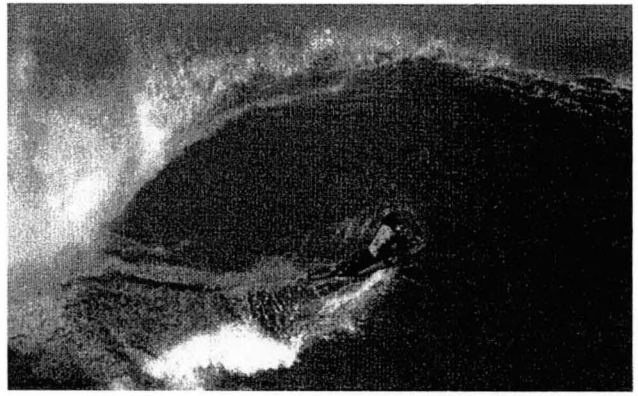
[24] See the extensive coverage in the mainstream media of the 'bashing' Nat Young's received as a result of aggression in the surf (e.g. *The Australian*, March 27 & 29, and April 1-2, 2000)

**Plate 6**



Left: Longboarding style (*Pacific Longboarder*)
Above Top: Bodyboarding (*Bodyboarding Hot Shots 2*)
Above: Shortboarding (unknown source)

legalistic regulation of surfing is something which is apparently already a reality in the United States. According to Langton (1999), undercover police patrol some Californian beaches in order to curb 'surf rage', and several surfers have already been charged with using their surfboards as a 'deadly weapon' by spearing them at surfers who 'drop in'. Langton (1999) claims that there is an *Open Waves Act* proposed which states that ".. no person, regardless of residence, lineage, social status or other reason, may lawfully claim the right to a wave".

The prospect of councils introducing surfing permits and certificates of competency, regulating on board design and the safety of maneuvers, and placing limits on the number of surfers allowed in the water; these are all plausible outcomes of the increasing popularity of the sport and the safety concerns which local councils may be liable to consider. And no doubt the administrative and policing costs of these measures would be past on to surfers following the 'user pays' principle; perhaps through the re-introduction of surfboard licenses! Overcrowding has the potential to facilitate regulation on a level that even the most ardent proponent of sportization would resist.

***Bodyboarding***

The popularity of bodyboarding has added considerably to overcrowding and its inherent problems. The modern short surfboard is extremely difficult to learn to ride and while novice bodyboarders are out having fun almost straight away, anyone struggling to learn on a shortboard typically faces many hours of frustration before they are even able to stand up[25]. Hence bodyboarding has become very popular with young surfers and those surfing for recreation.

Access to active participation in surfing has never seemed easier. Cheap versions can be purchased in mainstream stores everywhere. One surf shop owner in Perth estimated the body boarding population in that city to be around 20,000 (Fieldnotes 1995). Families go body boarding together on the summer weekends, and parent and child teams (usually father and son) can be found surfing on a more dedicated basis.

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[25] There are surfboards available which make learning a lot easier, but young neophytes are likely to face ridicule for riding them. Learning to ride through one of the 'surf schools' which supply these kind of surfboards for the lessons ameliorates this problem somewhat.

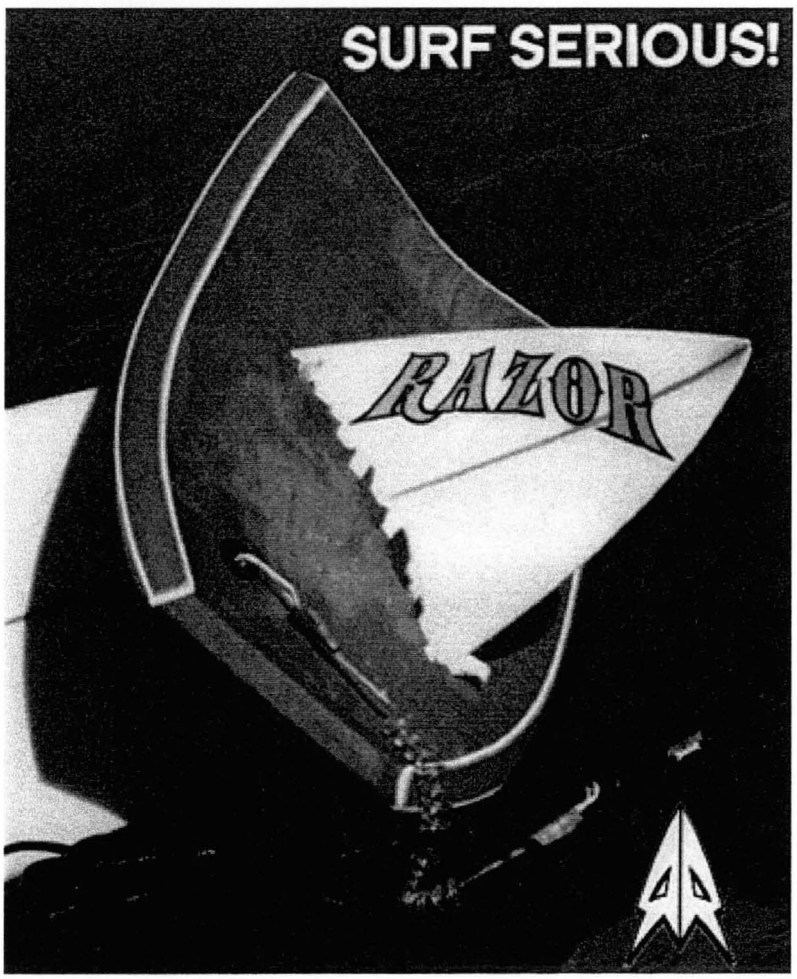
Many of these neophytes don't learn the etiquette of surfing before venturing out to compete for waves. Surfboard riders have reacted aggressively to this invasion of their territory and the affront to their well established norms. Early clashes in the water spread to open antagonism - through the media, through graffiti at the beaches and in verbal abuse in and out of the water. Bodyboarders are derided by surfboard riders as 'gut sliders', 'shark biscuits' and 'speed bumps' etc.. This antagonism is usually aimed at competent bodyboarders who are seen by surfboard riders to be stuck in beginner mode; i.e. they are failing to make the move into 'stand-up' surfing.

In some areas bodyboarders band together in the face of this opposition, forming a separate group apart from the dominant surfboard riding subculture. These groups often claim their own territory, usually at breaks where they can out maneuver surfboard riders (e.g. breaks with very steep and fast take off zones allow them to get the right of wave), and sometimes they succeed in driving off the surfboard riders through sheer weight of numbers. In areas where this kind of split has occurred, bodyboarders talk about surfboard riding as boring and reject any notion of bodyboarding as a transitional phase towards surfboard riding. Where their numbers are less and they share waves with the surfboard riders the bodyboarders often declare a desire to ride a surfboard and either intend to one day or feel that the transition would be too difficult. For this latter group the surfboard riders are seen as a step up in the surfing hierarchy, while for the former their group solidarity and conflict with surfboard riders has provided the basis for a separate status structure supported by their own bodyboarding media (*Rip Tide* - one of the Australian bodyboarding magazines - has a domestic readership of 194,950 (Brooks & Atkins 1993: 26)).

While people of all ages ride bodyboards recreationally, the core bodyboarding culture is essentially a youth culture, where risk-taking is highly valued and the style of surfing involves high energy acrobatics. As their skills improve the size and critical nature of the waves they ride and

**Plate 7**


A statement against bodyboarding on the wall of a café opposite a popular surfbreak car park in Torquay




The antagonism towards bodyboarding is reflected in this advertisement for surfboards

the style of riding inflicts a fair amount of punishment on their bodies. It is rare to find core bodyboarders over the age of 25. By this age they have either stopped surfing altogether, adopted a 'recreational' pattern, or made the transition to surfboard riding.

Bodyboarding introduces a combination of resistant and incorporating influences (between subculture and parent culture). Its contribution to overcrowding is potentially a pro incorporation influence, as is the fact that it provides access to a much wider group for recreational participation. Yet the youthful inventiveness of bodyboarding, often in opposition to the ageing surfboard riding population, provides an injection of vitality to the surfing subculture. The tension which exists is not sufficient to consider bodyboarding distinct from surfing subculture - groups of young surfers especially will often include a mix of bodyboarders and surfboard riders - however a factional rift between the two is quite evident.

*Longboarding*

Up until recently a similar career span existed for surfboard riders. The modern shortboard is thin and narrow making it difficult to paddle and to catch waves. It is designed for high energy acrobatics requiring the surfer to have flexibility, fast reflexes, and a high level of fitness to perform at an acceptable level. Older surfers often find themselves unable to compete with the younger surfers in the struggle for waves and in the surfing performances they can deliver. But with the revival of the longboard tradition, these older surfers can now take an alternative path; that of style and grace.

Based on the designs of the late 1950s and 1960s, these boards are longer, wider and thicker than the modern shortboard and consequently are much easier to paddle and catch waves on. They are nowhere near as maneuverable as the shortboards and are usually ridden in the old style, emphasizing grace and poise, rather than the aggressive style of shortboard riding.

Most of these older surfers either convert from shortboards or return to surfing on longboards because they are able to enjoy surfing with less effort and in a style which suits them physically. Those returning to

surfing reconstruct their surfing identities in a dialogue between the hypercommodified 'retro' longboard culture on offer, their past surfing identities, and their mainstream selves. Among these are 'successful' individuals with considerable status within the parent culture, and their 'coming out' helps legitimate and incorporate surfing within that culture. An example of this phenomenon is the Air Commodore who took up surfing again when he retired and transformed a local longboard club from one whose constitution was written on a beer carton - *There are no rules* - into a 'well oiled' incorporated organization affiliated with *Surfing Australia Inc.*, running competitions every month and promoting surfing as a 'family sport' (Boast interview 1995).

As Bourdie (1990) says, the practice of bodily postures is a way of inducing the feelings they express. The longboarders are not opting for a lower standard of performance, they are adopting a style which is rich in meanings from surfing mythology, providing the surfer with an experience of grace and style in tune with the 1960s heritage. This heritage is rapidly being constructed through a steady flow of surfing autobiographies from that era, through surfing magazines, through video productions, longboard clubs, and the revival of surf fashions and music from that era.

The involvement of veteran surfers in the longboard revival has no doubt added impetus to the current creation and institutionalization of surfing history. Examples of this process can be seen in the recent construction of the *Surfworld* surfing museum at Torquay, the creation of a *Hall of Fame* and an *Honour Roll;* all of which provide status and recognition for the older elite surfers and consequently for older surfers in general. This institutionalized recognition is in a form recognized by the dominant sports culture and is a step towards incorporation of surfing into that culture.

Because surfers are now able to remain active into relatively old age, and because of the myth making and the development of status within the surfing culture for the 'elders', surfing is potentially entering a new era. Longboarding promotes respect for older surfers and in so doing it paves the way for the 'wisdom' of the elders to challenge the dominance of youth. Heeding the counsel of elders fits in well with the postmodern

appropriation of ancient Hawaiian surfing mythology, and while longboarding is far from fitting painlessly into the surfing scene, the fact that many professional shortboarders are competing in longboard competitions is helping to integrate the two. Similarly, there is a growing trend amongst surfers who predominantly ride shortboards to include a longboard in their 'quiver[26]' to use when the surf is small. Neither of these trends are replicated for bodyboarding.

This renaissance has seen a boom in longboard sales with industry estimates claiming that in 1994 longboard sales were 50% of the US market, and similar trends were expected in Australia. While the longboard population was relatively small in Australia at the time of my field research in 1995 (approximately 5-10%), there were areas where they already made up close to 50% of the population. In these areas younger surfers were also riding longboards and clashes between longboarders and shortboarders occurred as the two groups struggled for territory. Longboarders can be just as unpopular with other surfers as bodyboarders. They can often catch waves earlier, and so gain the right to them, and they can't be run over like a bodyboarder. Like bodyboarders, longboarders have claimed territory in areas where they have high populations and where the waves are not that well suited to the shortboarders. The segregation between the three groups works well as often a break will best suit one group more than the others, but where this is not the case and the three struggle for waves together, the advantage longboarders and bodyboarders can have often causes resentment from the dominant shortboard population.

While the successful 50 year old businessman surfer provides an acceptable image to the non-surfing public, the ethos that the longboarding fraternity promotes through its media is a combination of early 1960s amateurism and a sanitized version of surfing's counter cultural values. The longboarding scene in Australia represents a rejection of the hypercommodified hype involved in contemporary shortboarding. A prominent advertisement for retro style sunglasses reads:

> They said, "Get a haircut."
>
> They said, "Get a gray suit."

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[26] A quiver is a surfer's collection of surfboards. Most amateur surfers have only one or two surfboards while top professionals might carry six or more on tour.

> They said, "Get a corporate[27] job"
> You said, "Get a life."
> You can spend your whole life worrying about what others think. Or you can live your life your own way, in your own style (*Longboard Quarterly* 1995: 2).

The corporate and civic lives of surfers who are prominent mainstream individuals helps legitimize surfing. But the surfing identity these individuals take with them into the corporate and civic worlds of the parent culture *effectively* challenges the Protestant ethic of modernity to an extent which the hardcore surfing lifestyles could not do. Like the recreational surfers, these longboarders act as carriers of the surfing aesthetic, but their 'carrying capacity' is far greater. Well-to-do longboarders can afford to adopt core surfer lifestyles (perhaps even hardcore), and so the level of aestheticization they embody while occupying positions of status within the mainstream is greater.

The pervasiveness/success of this process is demonstrated in a recent luxury car advertisement screened on Australian television: In this advertisement a fifty year old suited businessman (Nat Young) is driving his car from the country to work in the city along a coast road at dawn. When he arrives at his corporate car park the surf report on the radio tells him that the surf is the best it's been in ages, and so he drives back out.

The target audience of this promotion is not just middle aged businessmen surfers, it is successful mainstream baby-boomers in general, who can afford to indulge in luxury items. The marketing strategy is indicative of the legitimation of core surfing values within the parent culture - not only in relation to surfing of course, but leisure in general. This advertisement would appear to be a recognition of the role of surfing in this aestheticization process.

This commodification of counter cultural ethics is another example of the complexity of the dialectic; i.e. it is a process of resistance *via* incorporation; aestheticization *via* hypercommodification.

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[27] The addition of 'corporate' to this cliche is a significant concession to the longboard community of the 1990s. Nobody still living the alternative lifestyle of the '60s would be able to afford the hardwood framed sunglasses the advertisement is marketing, nor the surfing holidays to exotic places and other retro fashions peddled to this affluent new surfing market.

*Women*

The discriminatory manner in which women are typically treated in the male dominated surfing subculture (Stell 1992; Stedman 1997; Young & McGregor 1993; and interviews with Austen, Burridge, Blue*, Lynch, Atkins, Brooks, Farrelly, Bill* 1995) is said to be a characteristic of youth subcultures generally and a reflection of the role of women in the parent culture (McRobbie & Garber 1976: 211). But with the advancement of women's issues in the parent culture the subculture has become increasingly a site of 'residual' resistance to mainstream change. In fact Stedman (1997) claims that there has been a steady increase in sexism, homophobia and misogyny in the surfing media during this period of mainstream progress

It has been through the modern, rationalized sporting arm of the subculture, *Surfing Australia Inc.*[28] and its affiliated bodies, that equality for women has been advanced. *Surfing Australia Inc.*'s relationship with the parent culture through applications for grants, permits, sponsorship deals and media coverage, has ensured that the changes underway in the mainstream are reflected in the 'athletic sport' of surfing (Atkins and Reid interviews 1995).

One important factor in this has been the predominance of women attending the surfing schools run by *Surfing Australia Inc.* (Atkins interview 1995). The schools provide a safe 'athleticized' environment for women to learn to surf. A possible consequence of this is that a significant number of the increasing population of women surfers are being inducted into surfing as an incorporated sport within the dominant sports culture. Hence the discrimination, which Stedman (1997) claims was a deliberate attempt to manufacture difference between the subculture and the mainstream, has turned out to be a potentially significant force for incorporation.

*Section Summary*

The oppositional aestheticized subculture is maintained and constantly renewed through the lives of hardcore surfers and surfing's sacred sites. These sites provide opportunities for other surfers to participate in the

[28] As the thesis points out, the sports bureaucracy has also been an instrument of discrimination - especially in the early days of competitive surfing (see Chapter 8).

process of cultural production. Recreational surfers and older longboarders (and bodyboarding and longboarding generally) provide increased opportunities for interaction between the subculture and the parent culture. The process can involve incorporation and legitimization of surfing, however it also entails the 'warrening in' of the surfing aesthetic within the parent culture (Clarke et al. 1976).

The above processes can be characterized broadly as resistance via incorporation - a dialectical process. The mechanism for this is aestheticization and its postmodern links with (hyper)commodification. However, the potential for enforced legalistic regulation of surfing is inherent in the overcrowding of surf breaks and the inequality and sexism commonly experienced by women surfers. These factors are potential catalysts for incorporation within a modern legal rational system, which is at odds with any notions of synthesis and postmodern aestheticization.

The introduction of artificial surf breaks as a means of alleviating crowds also facilitates incorporation. As Donnelly (1993: 140) points out, this kind of interaction with the parent culture can lead to a loss of control by participants and administrators "... because government and private sponsors are able to assert policy, strategy, and changes in the form and possibly the meaning of an activity". While this hypercommodification is a postmodern process, the appropriation of control by the parent culture threatens to rationalize the surfing aesthetic.

An important factor in any rationalization is the level and character of postmodernization within the parent culture. For example, the juridification of surfing, while perhaps consistent with trends in risk management, would go against other postmodern trends of debureaucratization; such as self regulation and the shrinking state (Crook et al. 1992). Similarly, the *manner* in which the parent culture would regulate surfing - if in fact it chose to - is also contingent upon this dialectical postmodernization.

## Conclusion

A conflict between aestheticization and rationalization - manifest in the sensual desire to play in the ocean and the rational drive to order that play

- has characterized surfing's development at least since the imposition of colonial rule in the Hawaiian Islands

The conflict has taken a number of forms since then. In Hawaii in the early 1900s it started with the appropriation of surfing (as simulacra following Baudrillard 1988b) within the economic system as a tourist attraction and leisure pursuit organized through modern sporting clubs. Such clubs also played a major role in the early days of surfing in both the USA and Australia. In Australia this dynamic was most apparent when the movement for free bathing became the instrument for ordering the very freedom it had secured. A reassertion of the imperative to play is said to have been behind the breakdown of this dominant ordering in the 1960s with the emergence of a surfboard riding subculture in opposition to the SLSA.

The ASA's push for mainstream acceptance, as a counter to the imposition of mainstream juridification, became the focus for the re-emergence of the dialectic between the imperative to play and to order. This internal dialectic can be seen as a point of conflict in the wider dialectic of resistance and incorporation between the subculture and its parent culture. However, the conflict is far from clearly defined. The see-sawing dynamic of engagement and rejection between the subculture and the mainstream illustrates the complexity of this process, as does the apparent complicity over the construction of a respectable facade for surfing necessary to facilitate its engagement with the mainstream.

The treatment of women competitors is a further example of this complexity. It represents both a resistance to mainstream values while at the same time exposing the culture to juridification and infiltration of the culture by mainstream companies.

The subculture's position in this dialectic is both complicated and enhanced by the fact that the parent culture is engaged in similar dialectical conflicts with countless other cultures at the same time[29]. This image of 'disorganization' characterizes the postmodern process of negotiated hegemony Gramsci described. Interpreted in this way

[29] See Donnelly (1993) and Humphreys (1996) for examples of this kind of dynamic in other sport subcultures, in particular snowboarding, skateboarding and climbing.

postmodernization is constituted by multiple dialectical processes out of which multiple postmodern syntheses will presumably emerge.

Surfing's Dionysian character is maintained at the centre of the subculture via the lifestyles of hardcore surfers, myths, legends, and sacred sites. They provide a touchstone (either symbolic or experiential) for other core surfers or those whose lifestyles involve a greater degree of interaction outside the subculture. This latter group of surfers act as agents of aestheticization within the parent culture, but also provide a potential force for ordering within the subculture; although in the context of postmodernization the impetus appears to be in favour of aestheticization.

The surfing culture industry and the sportization of surfing are two important sectors of the subculture which interface to a considerable extent with the parent culture; through the marketing of surfing style as popular culture and through the promotion of surfing as a mainstream sport. The manner in which these sectors operate within the environment of postmodernization is of considerable importance to this analysis of subcultural resistance and incorporation. However, as I have indicated, it is the act of surfing which differentiates a surfer from someone who has simply appropriated the symbolic tokens of the subculture. Further, it is the sharing of the surfing experience which is at the heart of any surfing community. Above all therefore, it is the surfing experience which underpins the subculture's resistance. Before the impact of the surfing culture industry and sportization can be adequately dealt with, the significance of the embodied experience of surfing and the meanings attached to it need to be taken into account.

In the next chapter I examine the nature of the surfing experience and the way in which it functions as an anchor for surfers and their social configurations. In the following chapter I discuss the appreciation of the sublime as central to the surfing aesthetic and its significance for the subculture's neo-tribal forms, before returning to the surfing culture industry and the sportization of surfing in Chapters 7 and 8.

# CHAPTER 5
# RISK, SELF & SOCIAL CONFIGURATIONS

*They were all in love with dying*
*They were drinking from the fountain*
*That was pouring like an avalanche*
*Coming down the mountain*
*From "Pepper", a song by Butthole Surfers (1996)*

Having discussed the nature of the surfing subculture at a macro level in the previous chapter, I now examine surfing at the micro level; i.e. at the level of embodied experience and social interaction. The overarching problem which this chapter addresses is the nature of the self and the construction and maintenance of identity and social configurations within the surfing subculture. The theme of *aestheticization* informs the study of surfing's orientation towards risk-taking and the role embodied experience plays at this level.

The nature of the thrill of risk-taking as an ecstatic and transcendent loss of self - a dedifferentiation of subject and object – is discussed, as is the manner in which a deconstruction of gender has emerged out of this chase for thrills. A link between the achievement of this state and the challenge which risk-taking poses to the participant's skills is then established. It is suggested that the transcendent experience is facilitated by the depthless and fragmented nature of the postmodern self and that, in turn, it offers an anchor for the self. The experience is also said to provide the basis for a *conscience collectif* and the opportunity for further transcendence in the neo-tribal configurations which emerge out of the shared experience, and which are constantly renewed by bodily practice.

## Surfing as a Risk-taking Leisure Activity

Balint (1959: 111) claims that around the middle of the nineteenth century the kind of risky, thrill seeking activities of professionals performing at fairs and circuses - previously only experienced vicariously by spectators - began to be taken up more and more by the general population. He cites the emergence of amateur alpinism as one manifestation of the phenomenon, which he says "...has been gaining momentum ever since".

These risk-taking activities are almost always linked to thrill-seeking to some degree, both by analysts and participants. The kind of risk-taking activities addressed here excludes risks taken where the participant does not have some degree of control over the outcome. While psychological risks are an element in risk-taking for leisure I am concerned with those activities which also pose a threat of physical harm. Balint (1959) claimed that the basic elements of these kinds of thrill-seeking activities are:

> (a) some amount of conscious fear, or at least an awareness of real external danger; (b) a voluntary and intentional exposing of oneself to this external danger and to the fear aroused by it; (c) while having the more or less confident hope that the fear can be tolerated and mastered, the danger will pass, and that one will be able to return unharmed to safety (Balint 1959: 23).

The apparent paradox between the current orientation towards risk management as risk minimization, and the increase in participation in risk-taking leisure activities, has been noted by others (Celsi et al. 1993; Lyng 1990). As Celsi et al. point out, and my own study confirms, the increasing participation rates cannot be traced to any particular social category; except that perhaps female participation is catching up with male participation rates, and the age range of participants is broadening. The actual risk of physical harm faced by participants in some of these activities, popularly known as 'extreme sports', is highlighted by the following statistics from the United States 1978-80:

> During this period an average of 49 skydivers (one per every 700 participants), 50 mountain climbers (1/1,000), 122 scuba divers (1/100,000), 41 ultralight aircraft pilots (1/250), and 7 hang glider pilots (1/1,250) were killed each year. ... This compares to a fatality rate of one out of every 200,000 participants in amateur and professional [US] football during the same period (Celsi et al. 1993: 2).

Le Breton (2000: 2) quotes figures from *the* sports insurer in France, *Mutuelle Nationale des Sports*, which show that 101 subscribers died in 1995, 79 in 1994, 64 in 1990 and 45 in 1986. During the same 10 year period in which fatalities doubled, the number of insured dropped by one million (approximately 25 percent)[30].

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[30] Le Breton does not explain the reduction in the number insured. Since it is widely accepted that participation in these extreme sports is on the increase, one plausible explanation is that the reduction is due to increased premiums that would naturally flow from the increasing accident rates.

While others have included surfing in their analysis of risk-taking leisure (e.g. Donnelly 1988 & 1993; Schueller 2000), and it is commonly portrayed as one of the 'extreme sports' in the mainstream media, defining surfing or any other sport as a risk-taking activity is problematic. The degree to which any individual is at risk depends on the participant's level of skill, the challenge to which that skill is put and the possibility of harmful consequences should the challenge be too great. For a novice surfer, one metre high waves at a sandy beach may prove too great a challenge, and the prospect of drowning due to the power of the waves and a poor knowledge of local rips[31] and currents combine to present an imminent risk to that individual, while a more competent surfer would not be overly challenged by the size of the waves or the presence of rips.

Those who participate in risk-taking sports tend to enjoy pushing the limits of their skills (Balint 1959; Celsi et al. 1993; Lyng 1990; Le Breton 2000). The surfer who becomes too comfortable surfing one metre waves will usually prefer to be surfing something more challenging. People die

**Surfboard Riding Injuries**

**From a 1982 questionnaire**
- 346 respondents - all members of the Australian Surfrider's Association, Victoria.
- Year round average of 2.7 surfing days per week - A mean of 4 hours per day.
- Injury rate of 3.5 moderate to severe injuries per 1000 surfing days (Compares to 1.4 per 1000 for skiing).

**Injuries reported over a two year period:**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Head lacerations (24%) | 81 | Head fractures 24 (7%) | |
| Body lacerations (17%) | 57 | Body fractures 26 (8%) | |
| Sprains, dislocations and strains 119 (35%) | | Contusions 11 (3%) | |
| Ear perforations 19 (6%) | | **Total number of injuries** | **337** |

**Figure H:** Compiled from an article by Lowdon, Pateman and Pitman (1983) "Surfboard-riding Injuries", in *Medical Journal of Australia*, Vol.2, pp.613-616
There were 18 female and 328 male respondents. No sex differences were found in any of the variables so the data was combined.

[31] Rapid movement of water (sometimes *riptide*). At surf beaches it typically refers to the seaward return of water from the shoreward motion of breaking waves.

taking these challenges each year, and although surfing can be quite safe, given that the level of skill is adequate to the challenge, nevertheless injuries are quite frequent (see Fig. H).

These physical injuries occur in turbulent seas and so the risk of drowning is increased, thereby increasing the objective risk - the 'real' possibility of harm. The injuries usually occur when a surfer is driven into the bottom of the sea - rocks, coral or sand - or is struck by their own or another person's surfboard. Other injuries can be sustained from the force of the wave when it hits, or the violent fall and/or underwater pummeling inflicted on the surfer after falling off a wave or being caught by one when paddling out.

> A surfer "going over the falls" of a hollowed-out breaker may plummet the equivalent of three stories [and] the water he hits will feel only slightly less solid than a paved sidewalk. Then the building falls on top of him, driving him down perhaps against a coral bottom, while turbulence grinds him around like a pebble in a cement mixer. Then the monster collapses on him, and the next and the next, at approximately twenty-second intervals. Many are the hazards: lost boards flailing in the eerie murk, undertow, foam a foot deep between crests (a froth as wispy as beer suds: too much air to provide buoyancy, too much water to breathe) while rips suck the tiring swimmer even farther to sea (In Stone 1970: 63).

Not all surfers are prepared to ride waves the size of three storey buildings, and those that are will only get the opportunity occasionally in any one year. But the risks do not necessarily diminish along with a decrease in wave size; there are many other environmental risk factors - not to mention those associated with the surfer's own ability - and injuries are certainly not confined to big surf. While the following quote is from an experienced big wave rider, all core surfers will experience these moments with varying frequency and intensity:

> [I]t became a somewhat acceptable routine to burst to the surface and have so little oxygen left that I'd be in a state of actually passing out. I'd take in air, see stars and feel the very early stages of unconsciousness (Noll and Gabbard 1989: 150).

This occurs simply as a result of the physical pounding a wave delivers and the amount of time it keeps a surfer underwater or when the wave leaves the surfer trapped under seaweed or rock ledges, or simply pinned to the bottom of the sea by the force of its turbulence - sometimes long enough for two or more waves to pass overhead. There are no statistics available on surfing related deaths in Australia, and surfing media

coverage of death is pretty much restricted to notable surfers or spectacular instances such as shark attacks.

> Surf drownings are not new, but in the last few years some of the world's best and most experienced big wave riders have been killed at sea. The search for the ultimate big wave rush, for the image of an extreme surfer, combined with the unpredictable power of the ocean have taken their toll ... (Brown 1997: 7).

Although 'risk-taking' and 'thrill-seeking' are not synonymous, the link between the two in surfing is clear. In all the interviews conducted in this study the respondents agreed that the thrills which they initially experienced in small surf became harder to come by as they became more skilled. Some of the most experienced surfers reported that they could also find satisfaction in smaller waves, but the thrill achieved was not as intense.

> I can get enjoyment in small surf and this relies on me exploring equipment and stuff. ... Large waves or powerful risky waves increase the thrill, and the horror (Carroll interview 1995).

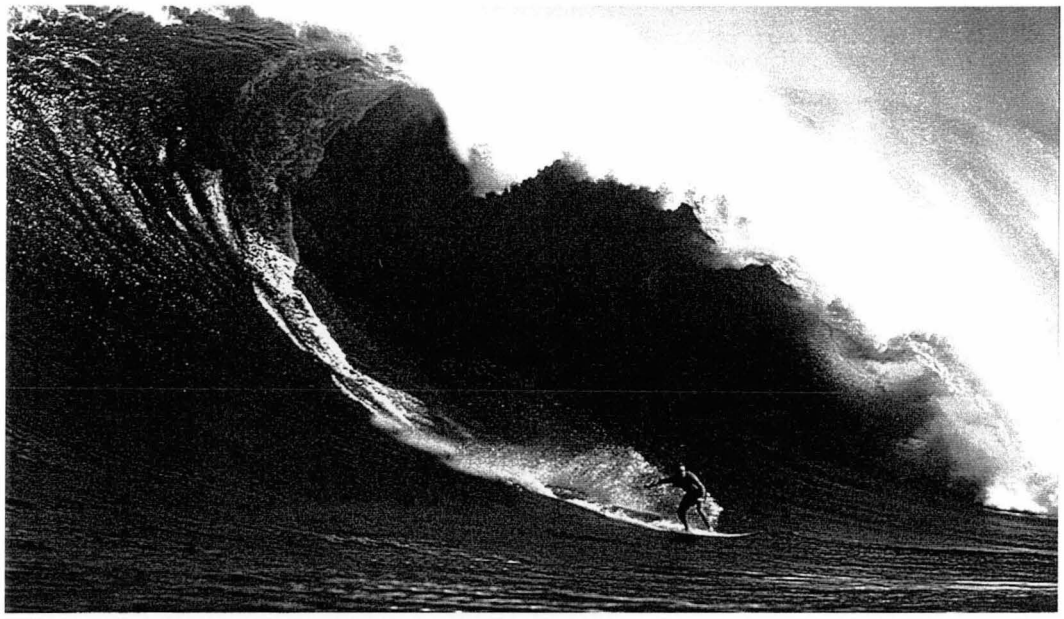
Neurobiologists suggest that the rush of adrenalin associated with risk-taking triggers the release of dopamine - a pleasure inducing chemical - but when the stress comes to an end the level of dopamine will drop, perhaps even below baseline: "Coming up short after a thrill could trap you in an addictive cycle, as next time it'll take even more to reach the same level of bliss" (Schueller 2000: 23). A desire to replicate the intense thrills results in the search for larger, and/or more challenging waves.

> It's like a drug. You get the thrill fairly easily at first, but then it becomes harder to achieve and you have to ride larger and larger waves in order to get that feeling again (Nick* interview 1995).

> You lose yourself tapping a power that's greater than you, like you're riding that wave of power literally; you become part of it. ... You chase it; it has like a narcotic effect (Burridge interview 1995).

Typically, surfers do not *consciously* strive to increase the level of risk; increased risk is simply a by-product of chasing the most intense thrills. Doka et al. (1990) concluded the same thing in their study of scuba divers. They found no evidence of any 'subintentional death wish' or 'counterphobic reaction to a morbid fear of death'. They claimed that few divers intentionally exacerbated the risk, and that the divers' risk-taking was simply the result of 'sensation seeking'. The risk-taking inherent in

## Plate 8



Big Wave riding (source unknown)

Smaller waves require shallower bottoms in order to form a tube. Here the coral reef is visible less than a meter below the surface, while a surfer rides under the curl of the wave (*Tracks*)

this imperative towards achieving satisfying levels of thrills is what distinguishes surfing as a risk-taking leisure activity.

> The level's always growing as to what's BIG. What's big is what's going to get me that feeling ... But still, I'm not out there because of this challenge with fear. It's fun. I love it (surfer in Lyon & Lyon, 1997: 180).

This kind of risk-taking activity is typically associated with young males, and surfing is certainly a male dominated pursuit. This begs the question as to whether any analysis of surfing as a risk oriented activity needs to differentiate between the embodied experience of men and women. In the section which follows I argue that despite a need to study gender relations within the surfing subculture more broadly, such a differentiation is unnecessary at this level (see Pam above).

## Gender and Risk-Taking

It has been claimed by some gender theorists that sport for 'boys' is about establishing masculinity in opposition to the feminine, and that aggressive male sport is a response to women encroaching into male spheres and serves to re-establish male superiority: "Male power is under threat and the institution of sport is used to re-establish male superiority and the inferiorisation of women" (Wearing 1996: 59; see also Connell 1995; Segal 1997). Another approach is to claim that risk-taking acts as a substitute for the lack of male initiation as men seek proof of their manliness in individual and competitive endeavours (Segal 1997). Many surfers are like Pat Vincent, the surfer in Connell's (1995) study of masculinities; they closely fit Connell's category of 'protest masculinity', including the following behaviours and attitudes:

> ... school resistance, ... heavy drug/alcohol use, occasional manual labour, short heterosexual liaisons. ... a response to powerlessness, a claim to the gendered position of power, a pressured exaggeration (bashing gays, wild riding) of masculine conventions (Connell 1995: 110-1).

Notwithstanding the influence of gender on an individual's access to participation, my focus on the embodied experience draws attention to the fact that, in line with the predictions of gender deconstruction in postmodern theory (Crook et al. 1992), this 'protest' lifestyle is becoming

less exclusively masculine behaviour[32]. Clearly participation by women has been obstructed by the masculinization of surfing (Stell 1992; Stedman 1997), but in order to examine the nature and significance of risk-taking at the level of individual experience, the question I address in this section is whether women who *do* surf do so for the same hedonistic, thrill-seeking reasons as their male counterparts?

*Separatism or Engagement*

According to Baker - a freelance surf journalist and past editor of a number of surfing publications - World Champion surfer, Lisa Andersen, "... is one who has broken down gender barriers by surfing at a level that *demands* respect" (Baker 1995: 116). Having run away from home at the age of 16 to go surfing full time (she turned professional at 18) her reputation as a rebel has enhanced her standing in the surfing culture. Andersen is an example of the women who share a supposedly masculine inclination towards youthful rebelliousness and a love of thrills in sport.

The masculinization of surfing style began with the numerical domination of the sport by males. This domination emerged out of aggressive competition for waves, and out of this numerical domination, a style of surfing evolved which is competitive, aggressive, and pushes the limits of athleticism. This dominant style of surfing values powerful movements and situates the surfer in the most dangerous part of the wave while performing these maneuvers. While surfers push their limits in the pursuit of thrills in this way the development of a judging system for surfing competitions has played an important role in developing and institutionalizing this aesthetic. Competitive surfing is based on the following general rule:

> A surfer must execute the most *radical controlled* maneuver in a *critical section* of a wave with *speed* and *power* throughout. The surfer who executes such maneuvers on the *biggest* or *best waves* for the *longest functional distance* shall be deemed the winner (Martin 1994: 101).

The culture's videos, and especially the magazines, can also be interpreted as playing a prominent role in the development of the dominant style of surfing. While powerful, aggressive, high-risk surfing is not simply a

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[32] Movies like *Thelma and Louise* and rock stars like Courtney Love are examples of new gender roles emerging in popular culture which present women as thrill-seeking, wild and rebellious.

product of 'market forces' the competition for spectacular images became an integral part of the competition for market share, and the 'new era' of aggressive surfing which emerged in Australia in the late 1960s (Booth 1995) provided the images, and a new standard upon which the dominant aesthetic has been built. Surfing's media stars learnt how to deliver what the photographers and their sponsors wanted; the more risk, difficulty, power and aggression, the more spectacular the shot. The result has been an escalation of both a 'media-friendly' athletic style and the competition to surf larger and more dangerous waves.

> Nat Young: Laird Hamilton signed a 10-year Oxbow contract, ... it says that he will actually ride the biggest waves in the world. ... He's towed into waves off the back of a boat out in the middle of the ocean, and we shoot pictures ... and because it's so dramatic, it makes fantastic copy. ...
>
> Matt Brown: So for people who haven't been out there, [waves] like a 5, 6, 7 storey building?
>
> Nat Young: Oh yes, absolutely. He has no fear. ... [I]t's not particularly healthy to be pushing the envelope to this degree, I don't think (Brown 1997: 7).

Technological advances supported this evolution; most importantly the introduction of legropes which meant that surfers could attempt even more difficult maneuvers and tackle more challenging waves without the inconvenience or danger of losing their surfboards[33].

Stedman (1997: 82) claims that the development of this dominant style further alienated women. But it does not necessarily exclude women on any physiological basis. As one sport scientist specializing in surfing points out: "Especially following lower body training, females have a similar capacity to use their legs to [perform] power maneuvers" (Lowdon 1994: 176). However gender theorists argue over whether it is in women's best interests to pursue this approach (McKay 1986; Wearing 1996; and Williams et al. 1986). The case for *separatism* argues that "... the best approach for females is to develop ... those sports which stress the gentler qualities rather than brute strength" (Williams et al. 1986: 224). Current modes of sport are said to have developed within a hegemonic system that favours males, and as Hoch puts it:

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[33] A legrope is a flexible cord which is attached to the ankle of a surfer at one end and to the surfboard at the other to stop the two being separated in the surf. Injuries from boards recoiling due to the elasticity of the legrope are a consequence deemed worth the risk by virtually all surfers.

> [T]he fight against sexism in sport, or in society generally, is *not* won by fitting a few females into the slots of the same repressive system .... What we don't need is a new generation of *female* gladiators (In McKay 1986: 147).

Those in favour of *engagement* argue that a separatist approach only reinforces notions of male superiority:

> The image of the youthful, gracious, lithe, subtle female floating graciously in the water or twirling ribbons to music does little to challenge male power. The development of alternative, less openly aggressive events based upon grace and style rather than thrust and muscle may be construed as signifying acceptance of women's biological inferiority and ornamental function (Williams et al. 1986: 224).

Surfing culture played out the theoretical debate in a 'real world' setting. Since the emergence of a more aggressive style of surfing until the mid 1980s, women surfers experimented with a feminine approach:

> Instead of trying to surf tough and overly radical, I accepted a style that emphasizes control, speed and graceful maneuvers ... skimming, gliding and blending with the wave (Oberg 1994: 87).

But the 'symbolic annihilation' (McKay 1991; Creedon 1994) of women as surfers in the surfing media meant that there was little opportunity for this approach to develop. The feminine style failed to gain currency as the vast majority of young women surfers simply didn't get the chance to see exponents like Oberg in action.

In spite of this exclusion women continued to take up surfing in increasing numbers, adopting male heroes and emulating the powerful and aggressive approach to surfing they saw in the media and at the beach.

> [W]omen who want to surf rather than spectate have no choice but to derive their identity from those who are portrayed as most active in the sport, that being the male surfers. ... For example, a top Australian female surfer, Kylie Webb, watches a Kelly Slater [World Champion male surfer] video in mental preparation for competition 'I watch it to death every day. The use of video is very important' (Versace 1993: 24).

Stell (1992: 30) reports that Pam Burridge plastered the walls of her bedroom with surfing photographs of her male heroes because "[the] women pictured in surfing magazines were models not surfers and the images alienated her". The surfing media's exclusion of women as active surfers and their sexist and even misogynistic attitude denied women

access to surfing's symbolic community as Stedman (1997) claims. They were also denied access to a 'feminine' surfing aesthetic, but a significant number of women would not be denied access to the thrills of surfing, and the images portrayed in the media provided an aesthetic which was adopted by these women by default.

> [T]oday's younger brigade ... prove their status by riding waves better. The women work harder at their maneuvers. They go for it like the men. This has earned respect. ... Women surfers don't want to be left behind. They want to be up there doing what is contemporary, and I can only see that situation improving. (Pam Burridge in Cassidy & Luton 1989: 81).

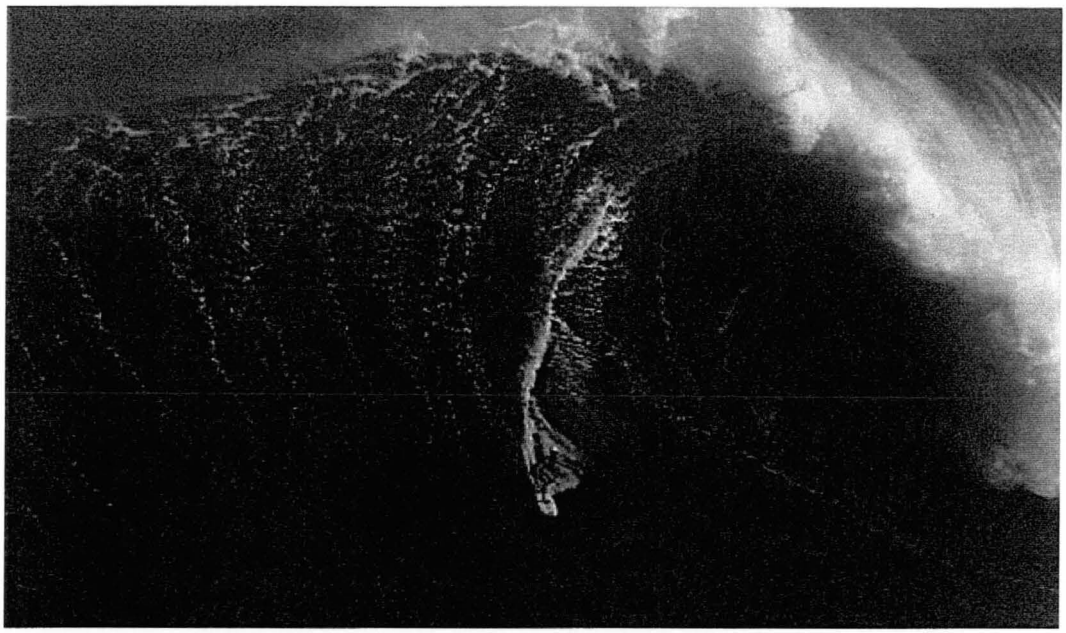
The following quotation from my interview with Pam Burridge leaves no doubt that for her this style of surfing is adopted in the pursuit of thrills; just as it is for men:

> If you get an incredible barrel [a large 'hollow' wave] you just scream ... it's an overwhelming exhilaration. ... The chase for dangerous waves and challenging situations, for power, pushing the limits ... the risk factor; it's very important. You feel stoked [thrilled] when you have nearly been killed ... it's weird (Burridge interview 1995).

The recent publication of an Australian surfing magazine aimed at women surfers, *Shred Betty*, unambiguously promotes this dominant style. In taking this approach women have opted for 'engagement' and in doing so they have progressed a deconstruction of gender ascription in surfing culture; at least in the wave-riding arena.

Men with a love of thrills have dominated the surfing scene for most of the modern surfing era but to claim that the outcome is a masculine style which excludes women is not sustainable when so many women are becoming 'hooked' on the search for thrills in this 'masculine' way. We could portray these women surfers as falling into the trap set by patriarchy designed to ensure the continuation of male dominance. But this approach ignores the embodied experiences of these women. In their search for thrills they have overcome (or simply ignored) any gender ascriptions in regards to what is an appropriate female approach to their art of surfing. And as Nat Young, a prominent 'elder' and past critic of the standard of women's competitive surfing, said recently, "... I see them as

## Plate 9



Laird Hamilton, after being towed by a jet-ski onto waves too big and moving too fast to paddle onto (*Australia's Surfing Life*).


Layne Beachley's powerful and aggressive style of shortboard surfing is the dominant mode for men and women (*Shred Betty*).

the most improved and entertaining element in pro surfing today" (Kampion 1998: 120).

*Deconstruction of Gender*

While young women are adopting the dominant style of surfing in increasing numbers, others are abandoning it. The chase for thrills, the emergence of professional surfing, the media imperative, and technological advances have taken the limits of this surfing aesthetic to a level of risk and athleticism way beyond the reach of many surfers. Instead of retreating in the face of the professionalization of their sport, to become spectators as Huizinga (1949) and Bourdie (1980) predict, what has occurred is a re-evaluation of what surfing means to the average surfer. A piece of surfing lore which says that *the best surfer is the one having the most fun* sums up this 'retro' mood. This has resulted in a divergence from the dominant style with men and women, mostly over 30 but not exclusively so, taking up riding longboards[34] and adapting the style of the early 1960s which emphasized graceful maneuvers and flowing with the wave; precisely the style which Oberg prescribed for women!

The divergence from the dominant trajectory of surfing, exemplified in the renaissance of longboarding, is a typically postmodern phenomenon. Through logical progression the dominant surfing style arrived at limits beyond the reach of a large proportion of the surfing population. Fragmentation of the culture resulted as the alienated rank and file reclaimed their sport through a range of less athletic 'retro' styles. This has not resulted in the demise of the dominant style but an expansion of options; just as Brystrom prescribed as a means of challenging the male dominance of sport: "We need to expand the qualities admired as skilful and important to include rhythm, grace, and other facets of sporting activity" (In Wearing 1996: 88). This process is one which Crook et al. believe is integral to postmodernization:

> Masculine and feminine gender categories are subdividing into various masculinities and femininities. As this differentiation process accelerates to radical levels the binary differentiation will lose clarity and dissolve (Crook et al. 1992: 38-9).

[34] These are surfboards based on the designs of the early 60s. They are longer, wider and thicker, and as a result, easier to use in less challenging surf.

Still, as it stands this new longboard arena remains numerically dominated by male surfers.

In their study of 'whiz sports' (e.g. surfing and snowboarding) in France, Midol and Broyer (1995) recognized this link between thrill-seeking and 'gender liberation':

> Young men have been able to access something traditionally defined as feminine, that is, to value that which comes out of the state of being while keeping a capacity for action, traditionally coded as masculine. The opposite is also true for young women. Youths of both sexes have sought a harmonious fusion with nature and the ability to act as well as enter that state (Midol & Broyer 1995: 208).

While theories of masculinity can inform our understanding of risk-taking, the increasing number of women becoming involved in high-risk leisure, including surfing, points to the need to look deeper into the nature of the experience and its basic attraction for individuals of either sex. As I have argued above, the essentialist approach of defining a risk oriented, powerful and aggressive style of surfing as masculine delegitimizes the experiences of the women who choose to find their joy in this approach, and equally, to define a graceful and rhythmic approach as feminine denies the male experiences. These broad stylistic categories are just two currently emerging in the polymorphous postmodern surfing scene, and the ascription of any necessary link with one or other gender can no longer be sustained. Consequently the following examination of the embodied experience of risk-taking does not differentiate between the sexes.

## Theorizing Risk-Taking

In this section various theoretical approaches to risk-taking for leisure are canvassed and the primary importance of the thrill involved in risk-taking is explicated and linked with the sociocultural construction of risk. The tension between aestheticization and rationalization continues as an explanatory theme, providing the framework for understanding the popularity of risk-taking leisure activities.

### *Risk, Thrills & Catharsis*

Risk has become an important issue in sociology. Giddens for example, argues that;

> ...thinking in terms of risk-assessment is a more or less ever-present exercise ... because of the shifting and developing nature of modern knowledge, the 'filter-back' effects on lay thought will be ambiguous and complicated. The risk climate of modernity is thus unsettling for everyone; no one escapes (Giddens 1991: 124).

The subjective nature of risk makes the analysis of it problematic. Risk is certainly not simply, as Keyes has claimed, "anything that scares us" (in Frey 1991: 138); risk can also excite us, and facilitate a heightened existential awareness. The leisure time risk-takers of this study are participating in very different reflexive processes from those of Giddens' (1991) and Beck's (1992) risk-managers, whose primary aim is to minimize danger[35]. For these and other commentators the present age is characterized by a calculating reflexivity linked with increasing individualization.

> The idiom of risk presupposes the idea of choice, calculation and responsibility ... [I]n earlier, 'simple' modernity, risk-taking affected only a limited number of spheres of life simply because so few of them were constructed in terms of choice at all. ... Existence becomes risky, as more and more of what happens to the individual and his or her loved ones are understood as a product not of impersonal social and natural forces, but of earlier decisions he or she has taken (Lash et al. 1996: 12-3).

In contrast with the above reflexive risk minimization, Giddens says that *voluntary* risk-taking provides a break from daily routine, and delivers instant gratification for risk-takers, while everyday life pay-offs may not occur for some years. He describes it as an experiment with trust which has implications for the individual's self-identity:

> Mastery of such dangers is an act of self-vindication and a demonstration, to self and others, that under difficult circumstances one can come through (Giddens 1991: 133).

Like Giddens, Harris' (1973) somatopsychic approach credits a great deal of importance to the bodily experience in the development of a self able to deal successfully with life's hazards; "... the security one has in one's body is related to the security with which one faces one's self and one's experiences" (Zion in Harris 1973: 174). Lyng (1990) also argues that voluntary risk-taking, or 'edgework' as he calls it, is a response to the threatening nature of contemporary society:

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[35] See Beck et al. (1994) for a thorough discussion between the three authors of the difference between the aesthetic reflexivity of Lash and the cognitive reflexivity of Beck and Giddens

> People want to be "survivors", but they sense that their chances of surviving are determined by mysterious, capricious forces having little to do with the individual survival capacities they may possess. By contrast, participants in edgework perceive that there is a direct link between survival capacities and survival outcomes ... [edgework] is regarded as empirical proof that one possesses the essential survival instinct - the 'right stuff' (Lyng 1990:873)[36].

Celsi et al. (1993) offer a similar macro level explanation, claiming that high risk sport provides an opportunity for catharsis via participation in a drama which allows for the kind of satisfactory conclusions usually unobtainable in everyday life, but which, through the dramatic framework used by the mass media in particular, we have been conditioned to seek (see also Rojek 1993: 104). In a later book Rojek (1995) presents a more fatalistic slant on these functionalist approaches:

> In a world in which everything is perceived as running down at an exponential rate our leisure assumes a last-chance quality. If we take that last calculated risk we may momentarily cheat the sense of general decay. But we may also die (Rojek 1995: 156).

While the above approaches situate risk-taking in the context of current social upheaval, they fail to take adequate account of the embodied experience - the thrill involved in the risk-taking activity. As I have argued elsewhere (Stranger 1999), this is like explaining human sexual behaviour in terms of the 'after glow'. Separating the two aspects of the experience - thrill and catharsis - and privileging one over the other distorts our understanding. We would not expect humans to stop engaging in sexual activity in exchange for a measure of after-glow, nor is it likely that surfers or skydivers would cease their thrilling activities in exchange for a measure of catharsis. Le Breton (2000) also recognizes the link between the two aspects of risk-taking experience in the following analysis of endurance activities:

> [T]he ecstasy that fuses an individual with the cosmos, gives only a temporary feeling of royalty but the memories will last and will be there to remind him or her of the pre-eminence of their own personal value (Le Breton 2000: 7).

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[36] Miller (1991) criticises Lyng for neglecting gender, the underclass, race and ethnicity in his study. She points out that women and these minority groups are probably subject to greater alienating pressures than those Lyng studied. She cites research into prostitutes who deliberately 'push the edge' in the manner Lyng describes and concludes that while the types of oppression to which edgework is a response are unique, "... experientially and in terms of social psychological impact, edgework might be functionally equivalent across these groups" (Miller 1991: 1533). In his reply to Miller, Lyng (1991: 1534-9) agreed with the points outlined above.

In this study's questionnaire, 81 percent of surfers claimed to surf for the thrill while only 11 percent mentioned the challenge as a motivation (see Fig. L); the latter being more commensurate with the notion of risk-taking as a proof of 'self worth' posited above. In Schwendinger and Schwendinger's (1985: 99) study of adolescent subcultures, they concluded that "... the single most important thing that brought adolescent surfers together was their joy in the act of surfing itself. They lived for the thrill...". While I agree with these authors, there are other social imperatives which contribute to an individual's propensity for risk-taking. In the following subsection I discuss these factors in relation to thrill-seeking.

*Status & Thrills*

The attainment of status and prestige, and peer group pressure are no doubt contributing factors in risk-taking leisure, as the following excerpt from an article in *The New Yorker* magazine illustrates:

> Everyone who surfs has a limit to the size of the waves he will venture among. The surfers in an area come, over time, to know one another's limits. In San Francisco, this mutual knowledge creates a dense little community, nervous and drawling, in the beach parking lots on big winter days - men pacing back and forth, fists plunged into pockets, discussing the matter with dry mouths, laughing too loudly while, out at sea, frightening waves rear and collapse. We study the waves, study the channels, trying to decide if the surf is within the range we can conceivably handle. The range is as much psychic as physical, and it is inseparable from the group: if X goes out, that doesn't necessarily mean I have to go out, but if Y goes out, I'll have to follow, because anything within his range is, I know, within mine (Finnegan 1992: 36).

The scene Finnegan describes is one I have observed and experienced many times during my surfing career. I witnessed the process during my fieldwork. At one site, for example, the surf at the main reef break was a good size - over twice an average person's height[37] - but very crowded.

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[37] This obscure way of describing the size of the waves is itself a product of the status and prestige attached to risk-taking in surfing. Surfers do not measure waves according to any scientific method; they are measured in 'feet' and though the measurement varies considerably depending upon location, it is invariably an underestimate in scientific/technical terms. The waves mentioned here, if measured scientifically - from trough to peak - would be 12 to 15 feet (4-5 metres) but in surfing terms they would typically be called 6-8 feet in Australia. The phenomenon is said to have its roots in Hawaii where the waves are measured from behind, but whatever the origins, today the underestimation of wave size is a facet of surfing culture which not only serves to distinguish the status of a surfer as an insider, but can also function as a means of status acquisition as surfers outdo each other in their *underestimation* of waves in their story telling. For example, surfer X might be recalling the day's surf to other surfers who weren't there and describe it as 6 to 8 feet, and surfer Y - who was there - disagrees saying that it would have been 6 foot

Further out to sea was another reef where the waves were very much bigger and more powerful; there were only two people surfing it. I listened to a group of surfers discussing whether to paddle to the outer reef - about half a kilometre further out to sea - or put up with the crowded conditions where they were. The conversation was one in which each surfer helped support the others in rejecting the option of the outer reef. It was clear that none of them had actually surfed that reef but the mythology which surrounded it in regards to the dangers was called upon to justify their position; hence no-one in the group lost face. If there had not been a consensus then status and prestige would have played a different role, as described by Finnegan above. Not simply because the ability of others serves as a yardstick of one's own ability though, but because a loss of face or the opportunity to gain prestige and status are at stake. These observations illustrate the point Douglas & Wildavsky (1982: 186) make when they say that the perception of risk and its acceptable level is a collective construct, "... a bit like language and a bit like aesthetic judgement".

In Huizinga's (1949) thesis of *sub specie ludi*, he claims that play is the origin of culture and society, and that attempts to explain it purely in terms of benefits beyond itself are flawed:

> Most of them only deal incidentally with the question of what play is in itself and what it means for the player. ... without first paying attention to its profoundly aesthetic quality (Huizinga 1949: 2).

Consistent with Huizinga, Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi (1988) argue that activities which challenge the skill of participants - play among them - can provide the individual with an autotelic experience; one which is rewarding in and of itself. This 'optimal experience', which they call 'flow', is said to be so rewarding that it motivates the individual to continue in the activity which provides it.

In Ewert's (1994) study of mountaineering, he claims that while the thrill is important at all levels of experience, this autotelic factor becomes increasingly important with experience. Extrinsic factors such as image and status become correspondingly less important. Pam Burridge, a world champion surfer, illustrates the primary role which the autotelic

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maximum. Surfer Y has portrayed himself or herself as less intimidated by these waves than X, and when those listening later hear Y tell of surfing 8 to 10 feet waves they may be even more impressed.

experience plays. As a teenager Pam disliked the surfing scene and even recorded a song which mocked the lifestyle. She disliked saltwater on her skin and the sun and sand, only going to the beach to surf and then leave (Stell 1992).

> I didn't hang out with surfers because they were so unfashionable back then and I didn't really like them. Surfing was my escape but I wasn't part of the social scene at all (Burridge interview 1995)

While there can be no doubt that competitive surfing played a major role in her feelings of self worth, it was the thrill of surfing which kept her involved. She turned her back on the lifestyle preferring the punk and music scene in which surfers were decidedly 'uncool'. For Pam the thrill of surfing was something which she pursued in spite of the negative social consequences it had for her at the time.

> I loved surfing and I wanted to be a surfer but ... I was looking for just a completely different peer group. I didn't want to join the one I saw at the beach, they just bored me. ... My [non-surfing] friends gave me heaps about surfing's image ... and they'd lump me with that and I'd try and explain to them without being hurt ... but it always got to me (Stell 1992: 78).

Status, prestige and peer pressure can clearly be factors which affect a participants risk-taking activities, and the theories of masculinity outlined in the previous section can help inform a greater understanding of this influence. But the desire for the thrill is a fundamental factor, as the case of Pam Burridge illustrates, whereby it subordinates the sociocultural influences we tend to consider so central to human behaviour. The manner in which I have observed surfers speak of the influence their surfing mates have on their risk-taking serves as a further illustration of the fundamental role which the embodied experience - the thrill - plays in this equation. I have often heard surfers lament the fact that they have not had anyone else to go surfing with when confronted with the opportunity for a high-risk surf. The question of safety is often raised as a rational justification for the need of company, but the main thrust of their lament is that two or more surfers will often goad each other into taking on the risks. Given a challenge on the edge of an individual's ability, the leverage towards accepting the challenge which 'group courage' can provide is a recognized device amongst surfers in their search for the thrills.

While this section has emphasized the way in which sociocultural factors are subordinated to the quest for thrills, it is not my intention to claim that risk-taking is an activity *sub specie ludi* (Huizinga 1949). Rather it is the *desire* for thrills which has its basis in that realm, while the pursuit of them is clearly situated in the social and cultural arena. My position on this is not fully explained until the following section, however the role of social and cultural imperatives for risk-taking are further explicated in the next subsection where I discuss the subjective nature of risk perception.

### *Risk Perception*

Recent psychological approaches argue that people who take part in risky sports score highly on the thrill seeking, stress seeking or sensation seeking scales and low on arousal avoidance (Ewert 1994; Doka et al. 1990; Kerr 1991). They claim that these risk-takers don't normally take part for the risk itself, but for the thrill involved: "The basis of creativity, of risk taking, of exploring, of adventure, of all those things - there's a very simple motive: thrill" (Farley in Schueller 2000: 24). My own experience and research supports these findings; the dangers involved are in many ways incidental, certainly peripheral. The challenge which a risk offers is usually only accepted when it is going to add to the thrill of the activity. For example, surfing in shark infested waters adds to the risk but does not provide a challenge to the participant's surfing skills, and so adds nothing to the thrill of surfing itself. Given the choice of surfing either of two locations, equal in all respects except that one is shark infested and one shark free, surfers would choose the latter[38]. The point is that the

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[38] **Postscript:** After first submitting this thesis, in the summer of 2000, there were three fatal shark attacks in close succession at surf beaches in Australia; all three had been visited as part of this research, in particular Cactus. An article in the surfing media covering these attacks challenges to some extent my argument that the presence of sharks does not increase the thrill. While the coverage treated the desire of those most affected by the deaths to kill the 'rogue' sharks involved with sensitivity it nevertheless pushed the expected line that the ocean was their territory and we accept the risks in order to reap the rewards. But it went one step further:

> Flirting with death is the unmentioned basis of surf stoke [thrills]. This is why big waves are more exhilarating than small ones, why solo night sessions are such a buzz, why every session in South Australia is accompanied with an intense awareness of nature and water movement all around that can border on enlightenment or paranoia; uncomfortable or intolerable. Surfers know, when surfing the Southern Oceans especially, that we are not the alpha animal, that death rides with the territory. Yet not an ignoble death in bed, but death in the saddle, becoming one with the sea, white death. Death after being truly alive (Green 2000: 58).

The inclusion of sharks (or at least the fear of sharks) as a catalyst for thrills in this narrative is unusual and represents, I believe, a reaction to either a perceived or real increased presence along the Southern Australian coastline of white pointer sharks ('white death'). It demonstrates the flexibility of the postmodern surfing aesthetic; i.e. given this in-your-face presence of predatory

existence of hazards over which the participants have little or no control do not usually contribute to the thrill of the sport. Risk provides a motivating thrill when it challenges the skill of the participant, not when it distracts from the participants' focus on their chosen activities. The following mountaineering example also illustrates this point:

> Does the death of a climber make a certain mountain or route more attractive than others? The answer is probably yes, at least where the severity of the climb has been the prime factor in the accident. It is not necessarily true, however, where a fortuitous avalanche or sudden storm has been the killer (climber in Celsi et al. 1993: 16).

Another approach is to claim, as Giddens (1991) does, that voluntary risk-taking which is geared into lifestyle packages is not always or even usually assessed as separate risk items. These risks are accepted as part of the lifestyle package (Giddens 1991: 125). This process is consistent with what he calls 'bracketing out' where, at the level of 'practical consciousness', anxieties about ontological security are suppressed at a non-conscious level (Giddens 1991: 35-40). The following response from a skydiver who had just lost a friend in a skydiving accident is illustrative of this point. He is responding to the incredulity of outsiders that he intends to continue skydiving:

> If you're driving down the road and you see a bad wreck, somebody is dead ... [you don't] say 'I'm not driving my car anymore' ... you drive on - same thing with skydiving[39] (Celsi et al. 1993: 19).

But as Balint (1959) has pointed out, risk-taking for leisure involves a recognition of the danger and the risk-takers themselves say that they are driven to take risks in order to achieve the thrills they seek. In the day to day interaction between risk-taking participants the dangers are recognized and openly discussed, especially among novices and between the novices and the experienced participants. Tales of valour and 'near misses' play a major role in the myths and legends of surfing and I expect the same is the case for other risk-taking sports. It is the fate of every novice surfer to be subjected to these stories. Surfing magazines report in

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sharks surfers may neutralizing their fear by including them in their appreciation of the sublime in nature - that heady synthesis of fear and desire (Stranger 1999) (see the following chapter for a detailed explanation of the role of the sublime in surfing).

[39] This is a theme common in surfing as well e.g. 'You have more chance of being killed in a car accident on the way to the beach than being taken by a shark'. Ironically Australia's most famous surfer shark victim, a person with the nickname of 'Sharkbait', who had been bitten on a number of occasions (just how many times varies with the telling, but at least two are documented) was killed in a car accident driving to his home at Cactus beach in 1996.

detail, and where possible with graphic images, on any surfer attacked by sharks (see Plate 10). *Waves* magazine has a 'Gash of the Month' segment where the best photo sent in by a reader of a laceration incurred while surfing is presented. This process in fact contributes to the normalization of risk-taking, but the dangers are not *hidden* within any 'lifestyle package'.

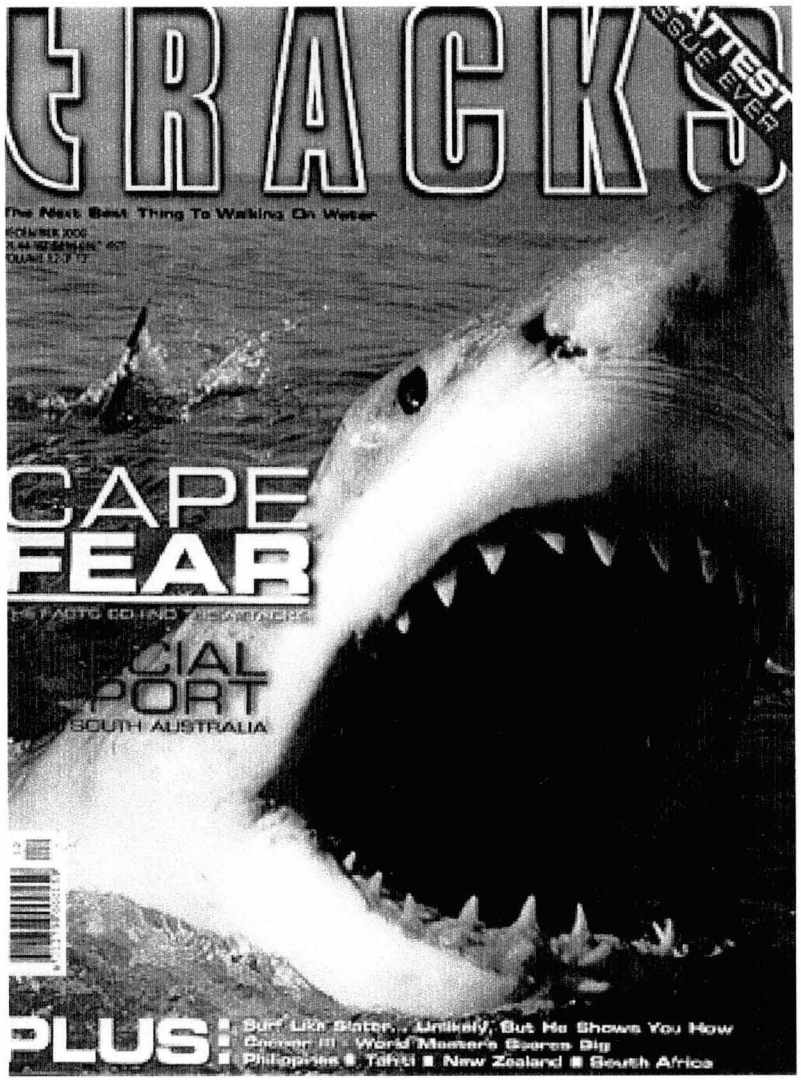
> [S]urfers did not underestimate the dangers inherent in a fall on hard water, the cartwheeling board, the menace of rocks and coral, and the possibility of drowning. ... They perceived the wipe-out as death - actual in big waves, symbolic in small ones. For some, this ritualistic acceptance of death was the attraction of surfing (Stone 1970: 104).

Surfers are often confronted with their mortality in a turbulent ocean environment. In almost all surfing sessions, even on days when the surf is relatively small, the surfer will be held under the water and thrashed around by waves for a period of time over which they have very little control. Techniques can be employed to minimize the time but essentially the experience is one in which the surfer is forced to hold their breath until the wave releases them and they can return to the surface.

> I still have fear obviously, because I have a fear of dying, but I'm trying not to let the fear have control over my body. ... Fear just exists. That's the way it is. The better you can deal with it the more prepared you are for any situation (surfer in Lyon & Lyon 1997: 95).

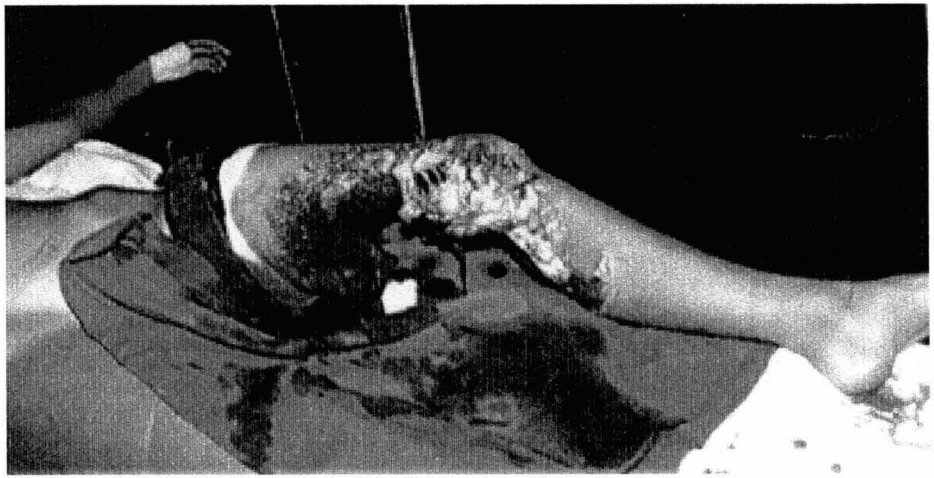
Lyng (1990) claims that risk-takers don't recognize the degree of risk because they are under a false impression that they are in control of the situation. This illusion is said to have developed through the combination of skill and chance which provides them with the feeling that they are in control of the activity, when in reality there are many elements which are uncontrollable. Celsi et al. (1993) argue against Lyng, saying that the risk-takers are under no illusions as to the dangerous nature of their activities.

Plate 10




◀ This issue of *Tracks* (December 2000) - one of the most popular surfing magazines – appeared just after two surfers and one swimmer had been killed in the surf in Australia by White Pointer sharks.

▼ This photograph of a surfer, after being attacked by a shark in South Africa, appeared on the front cover of *Track* (December 1996).



They cite as an example the following quotation from a skydiving seminar:

> Don't kid yourself. Skydiving is dangerous. I've had a lot of friends die skydiving. In reality, even though we maneuver through the sky, we are falling like a rock (Celsi et al. 1993: 17).

Celsi et al. claim that participants become acculturated into a risk-taking identity and come to see risk-taking as the norm. They are aware of the dangers and believe they could cope with most situations that can cause problems; they take calculated risks. It would appear that at least some risk-takers are under an illusion as to their ability to cope since approximately 2 - 3 skydivers fall to their deaths each month in the US alone (Celsi et al. 1993: 18).

As Luhmann (1993: 30) points out, "Every risk evaluation is and remains context bound", and the habitus of the risk-taker provides a significant foundation for any specific context. A part of the acculturation process which Celsi et al. found in skydiving was a belief that the risks are manageable. Right from the beginning novice skydivers are taught that if they follow procedures correctly then they will come to no harm. This phenomenon was also found by Doka et al. (1990) in scuba diving, and a similar approach was reported amongst hang-gliders who believed that "... 'good flyers' are exempt from the dangers by virtue of their expertise" (Brannigan and McDougall 1983: 42). As a result of this instilled belief, accidents and deaths are inevitably attributed, at least in part, to human error and consequently there is always the possibility that they could have been avoided. By blaming the deceased the myth that these activities can be made safe is maintained;

> [In scuba diving], unless it can be demonstrated that the death resulted from avoidable human error the assumption that the sport can be made safe is belied (Doka et al. 1990: 219).

The bureaucratic response to these high-risk activities is to differentiate between 'safe' sanctioned behaviour and 'unsafe' deviant behaviour, and in this way the misfortune serves to reinforce the solidarity of the group rather than weaken it. This mode of blame attribution is consistent with Douglas' (1992: 5) 'moralistic' category[40] whereby the community is exhorted to obey the rules in order to avoid the dangers.

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[40] The other two modes of blame are ; i) to attribute it to individual adversaries; or ii) to attribute it to an enemy of the community (Douglas 1992: 5-6).

But the surfing subculture has not adopted this mode. Surfers who die surfing are not treated as deviants but as heroes,[41] in some cases with plaques erected and competitions held in their memory. By not attributing blame, either to the victim, adversaries or enemies, surfing fits the kind of community which Douglas (1992: 6) says "... can only survive by a heroic programme of reconciliation". But rather than a 'programme of reconciliation', solidarity in surfing is - at least as far as the acculturation of risk is concerned - due to a shared (positive) fatalism; a recognition that there is an element of risk in surfing which is beyond the surfer's power to control, rather than the product of a shared belief in the protection of bureaucratic procedures; "To have the ultimate thrill, you've got to be prepared to pay the ultimate price" (attributed to Mark Foo who drowned in large surf Dec. '94: *Free Surf* 1995, February, p. 9). In surfing there is no institutionalized risk management, and nature is seen as superior, always a little unpredictable and potentially dangerous.

> The reason that we do it is that we're overawed by it. I can't believe that every day I just paddle out there and I have to surrender myself and my control over things, and I have to fit in with this force way greater than me, and it becomes your god, or it helps develop your gods (Barton Lynch, ex-world champion surfer, in Brown 1997: 7).

It is not so much the exercising of *control* over nature which provides the thrill in surfing as *playing* with or *challenging* the forces of nature: "I never feel like I conquered it. I just feel lucky enough to ride a few big ones and get back in okay" (surfer in Lyon & Lyon 1997: 112).

The key to understanding the different approaches is in the different levels of bureaucratization. The above mentioned studies of skydiving, scuba diving and hang-gliding all revolved around club activities. The first two having the most well established bureaucracies with jump masters and dive masters, certification and formal teaching requirements, concerns over litigation, and inevitably the minimization and rationalization of risk which is inherent in the bureaucratic paradigm; i.e. either the risk isn't statistically significant or if it is it can be reduced, if not eliminated, by what Crook (1997) calls the 'Modern Ordering' of risk[42], whereby risk is abated or controlled through 'organized' risk management.

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[41] See for example the surfing media coverage of the deaths of Mark Foo (*Free Surf* February 1995) and Todd Chesser (*Waves* May 1997), both prominent big wave surfers.

[42] While Crook (1997) attributes this mode to the state, transferring it to this level of organization appears to be unproblematic.

The process can also be seen as an example of Giddens' (1991) sequestration of experience, whereby events which may cause the individual to question their ontological security become the realm of abstract systems (in this instance clubs and governing bodies) in which the individual can place their faith. The individual places their faith in the bureaucratic control of the risk and trusts the procedures prescribed to ensure safety. In doing so the exposure to risk is not experienced as acutely. The ordering and rationalization of these essentially aesthetic activities provides a means whereby the awareness of risk can be 'bracketed out' as Giddens suggests.

Further, bureaucratization defines the activity as a sport and participation is justified on instrumentally rational grounds, such as character building, teamwork, health and fitness, and catharsis. This legitimates the activity in the mainstream arena in opposition to hedonistic thrill seeking, which is defined as deviant, reckless, selfish and irresponsible (see Brannigan & McDougall 1983).

Only 23 percent of respondents to this study's questionnaire claimed membership of a surfing club or organization[43]. Most surfers participate outside any formal organization; there are no meetings, no certification, no formal hierarchy, for most there is no formal instruction (only 13 percent of all respondents had received any formal coaching), no safety regulations or responsible bodies - no formal rules[44]. In line with Maffesoli's (1991) 'cultures of sensation', surfing's communal activities often revolve around an obligation-free sociality which emerges out of surfers simply coming together.

Within the broad boundaries of the surfing aesthetic, the individual (with various levels of 'guidance' from their peers; as discussed above) decides when and where they will surf, what level of danger they are prepared to face and what precautions they will take. This level of freedom from formal constraint is evidenced often when surfers defy council orders

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[43] This figure excludes data from two sites - one at a club house and the other at a competition where club membership was mandatory. The other sites where data was collected all had clubs in the location - except one which had a higher than average level of membership in any case. Membership was registered for boardriding clubs, *Surfing Australia Inc.*, and the SLSA.

[44] There is an etiquette which essentially governs the rights of a surfer to claim a wave and ride it uninterrupted (see Pearson 1979; Scures 1986).

regarding beach closures due to dangerous surf. Douglas' (1992) 'dissenting enclave' - one of her four 'cultures of the city' - is consistent with surfing culture in this matter:

> Many in such a community would deride the cult of safety. Death comes to all in the end. Who would rightly want to live a safe life if that means no passion, no ecstasy, no abandon? The idea of a high-risk lifestyle is an accepted norm (Douglas 1992: 118).

Risk in surfing culture is celebrated, even exaggerated, and risk-taking is valued. This ethos reflects Nietzsche's Dionysian impulse whereby we are encouraged to 'live dangerously' (Balint 1959: 31). For Nietzsche, the denial of experience, which is inherent in modern, rational, Apollonian culture "... withers the flesh, decomposes the mind and deadens the soul" (Rojek 1995: 81). The Dionysian spirit is recognized by Maffesoli (1996) as constitutive of the 'collective force' (*puissance*) behind contemporary tribalism, and in surfing there is evidence of a Dionysian 'aesthetic reflexivity' (Lash 1993) countering the Apollonian imperative towards sequestration and rationalization of the untrammelled risk experience (see also Beck et al. 1994; Lash and Urry 1994).

Crook (1997: 16) points to the type of risk management which best describes the surfing mode. He claims that current regimes are flawed because they tend to produce more risks than they can 'abate or control', and suggests a way out of this dilemma through "... a spreading awareness that living with risk means living with uncertainty and instability". This can be compared with Lasch's 'fatalistic' type response to risk (in Rojek 1995: 154-5), but in surfing culture this fatalism is coupled with another of Lasch's types - 'trivialization of risk' - where the acceptance of nature's dominance is characterized by a positive acceptance of the risk.

> Although the wipe-out was often treated with wry humor, such as the "Moment of Truth That Separates the Men from the Poise," surfers did not underestimate the dangers ... and the possibility of drowning (Stone 1970: 104).

It is consistent with the ethos of Douglas' (1992) 'dissenting enclaves' and perhaps even a necessary, though certainly not a sufficient condition, for a lack of blame attribution in regard to fatalities (i.e. it would seem that unless a participant in high-risk leisure accepts that risks beyond their's or others' control are inherent in the activity then they are locked into a paradigm of attributing risk). It is also an aesthetic judgement rather than

a cognitive one and reflects the postmodern 'end of enlightenment'. It is a move away from cognitive reflexivity in favour of aesthetic reflexivity (Lash 1993, Beck et al. 1994, Lash & Urry 1994).

*Section Summary*

The attainment of status and prestige, the development of self confidence, and the benefits of cathartic experience, can no doubt be relatively important factors motivating risk-taking behaviour, but these factors seem to be subordinate to the autotelic thrill inherent in the embodied experience. Surfers are thrill-seekers who take risks in the pursuit of those thrills. They are aware of the risks they take but that awareness is one which is constituted from within a broader surfing aesthetic; one which values risk-taking and encompasses a Dionysian desire for embodied experience and adventure.

The idea that surfers are under an illusion as to their ability to cope with any dangers is one which relies on an abstract notion of 'real risk' from which the individual has lost touch. As has been pointed out, such a concept of risk is highly problematic (Luhmann 1993; Douglas 1992; Crook 1997; Douglas & Wildavsky 1982); risk is a sociocultural construct. Certainly the skydivers who fell to their deaths were deluded if, as Lyng (1990) and Celsi et al. (1993) suggest they believed that they could avoid such a fate by following the rules. But as I have argued, their perception of risk was formed from within a bureaucratic paradigm which provided the illusion; i.e. that the risks are known, predictable, and therefore avoidable.

The dichotomy between the modern bureaucratic and the postmodern aesthetic forms - the Apollonian and the Dionysian cultures - is clearly an abstraction which does not exist in the concrete world in such sharp contrast. Surfers do believe that they can cope with most situations or they would not venture into the ocean; they justify their risk-taking to some degree in rational terms (see for example the earlier footnote which discusses the risk of shark attack in a quasi statistical manner); and if a surfer died as a direct result of another's negligence then that person would surely be attributed with some blame. And despite the bureaucratic sequestration of risk, skydivers are surely not totally ignorant of the possibility of 'unforseen circumstances'; or thoroughly

alienated from the thrill of the jump by virtue of their membership of a club.

Notwithstanding the above, an analysis of the Apollonian and Dionysian character of the various risk-taking subcultures has proven to be useful for understanding the different approaches to risk perception; helping to explain the way in which the individual experience is enmeshed in the sociocultural construction of risk. In the two sections which follow the implications of risk-taking, first for the self, and second for social configurations, will be examined.

## The Nature of the Thrill and its Consequences for the Self

The sociocultural construction of risk discussed above occurs within a habitus which provides meanings and an aesthetic through which risk is recognized and assessed, but any risk-taking itself is in the end (e.g. at the point of 'taking off' on a wave) a highly individualistic moment with real and imminent consequences for the embodied self, and slightly longer term consequences for the way in which the individual relates to the group and its habitus. As Mennell (1994: 180) reminds us, "... every process of socialization is also a process of individualization".

The nature of the thrill of risk-taking as an ecstatic, transcendence of self - a dedifferentiation of subject and object - will now be examined. The achievement of this state is linked (to a considerable extent) to the challenge which risk-taking poses to the participant's skills. It is argued that the transcendent experience is facilitated by the depthless and fragmented nature of the postmodern self, and that, in turn, the experience offers an anchor for the self which contemporary society often fails to provide.

First hand descriptions of the thrills involved in risk-taking leisure activities are often consistent with what Maslow (1970) termed 'peak experiences'. Peak experience is said to involve feelings of oneness with the universe; distortions of time; intensely focussed concentration; non-judgmental cognition; ego-transcendence; and fearlessness.

> ... the ecstasy or the "going out of oneself" seen in whiz sports[45] ... the sensation of being at one with the environment, and the feeling of entering an altered state of consciousness have become familiar notions. ... Time and space are one and the same, the event seems to unfold in slow motion ... (Midol & Broyer 1995: 209).

In surfing culture these moments of harmony with the ocean are a part of the folklore and surfing vocabulary. Being 'stoked' is a surfing term that describes the high the thrill of surfing can induce. The peak experience is said to be an ecstatic and intrinsically rewarding one.

> The release is incredible. I've heard it from everybody else. You can see the goosebumps on their bodies when they talk about it. ... There is no drug like it. There is nothing [else] on earth that has done that to me (surfer in Lyon & Lyon 1997: 140).[46]

Freud (1962: 13-4) had interpreted these 'oceanic' feelings of oneness with the universe as manifestations of an individual's memory of 'primary ego-feelings'; from before the ego became separated from the infant child's external world. He described the primary ego state as " ... a feeling which embraced the universe and expressed an inseparable connection of the ego with the external world". Other psychological interpretations of these ecstatic or 'mystical' experiences follow the same line; for example Prince and Savage claim that they are regression experiences; "... a person may well go back to the very earliest sensations of childhood when there was practically no boundary between self and the world " (in Creeley 1974: 38).

Balint (1959) developed the regression concept further, linking it with risk-taking behaviour. He argued that during the early post-natal months the infant and its external world 'mutually penetrate each other' in an

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[45] They name surfing, windsurfing, snowboarding, extreme skiing, and skateboarding as examples of 'whiz sports', which they say focus on the intrinsic 'fun' of the activity.

[46] The following are examples from a variety of sport/leisure activities:
"... the harmony by which the limits of the body blend with the environment, when skis have stopped vibrating and begin to glide, when it leaves the zone of real time enters the unreal" (Skier in Midol & Broyer 1995: 208); "[T]he surfer is not really in consciousness but rather has transcended the conscious. ... Being is captured by the surfer, not only as an act of *his* own but as a force of the *wholeness* of existence" (Slusher 1967: 179-80);"I am no longer me operating in the environment, it is me being a collective part of the environment, and that's ... the buzz" (Scuba diver in Davies & Whitehouse, 1995: 11); "Man and board are as centaur riding the wave, so that for a short spell they are indistinguishable, and all three unite with that sense of oneness and identification that man seeks all his waking life" (In Stone 1970: 60); "When pressed, [skydivers] collectively respond that nothing else exists in their world but that moment itself - no sense of time, just a kind of holistic oneness that makes them feel good and somehow changed" (Celsi et al. 1993: 11); "Its like you're on automatic pilot, so you don't have any thoughts. You hear the music but you're not aware that you're hearing it, because it's part of it all. ... Everything else goes away, it almost happens in slow motion ... it's just such an eerie, eerie feeling" (Figure Skaters in Jackson 1992: 168-9).

'harmonious mix-up', but the eventual discovery that external separate objects exist is a traumatic experience which destroys this world. Balint claimed that we all strive to regain this 'primal harmony'.

> This striving for a complete harmony between the subject and his environment may be approximated (a) in our sex life ... and (b) in all forms of ecstasy (Balint 1959: 64).

Balint describes two ideal type reactions to the individual's traumatic discovery of separateness as:

i) the ocnophilic personality who clings to objects pretending that they are not separate and recoils from the spaces between objects (the ocnophil does not find risk-taking a thrilling experience as their security is found in contact with objects rather than abandoning themselves to the hostile world between them); and

ii) the philobatic personality who adopts the fantasy of friendly open spaces between objects and a constant vigilance and development of skills to deal with these objects.

The philobat regresses to a state of 'primary love' - harmony between subject and object - through the development of skills on both the physical and psychological level which induce the object or even the whole world into the role of cooperative partner. This strategy demands constant reality checking which involves the philobat in risk-taking activities.

> The price he has to pay seems to be a never-ending repetition of the original trauma, a kind of traumatic neurosis. In order to regain the illusion of the friendly expanses, to experience the thrill, he has to leave the zone of safety and expose himself to hazards representing the original trauma (Balint 1959: 87).

The risk-taking induces the thrilling subject/object dedifferentiation desired and so the philobat becomes a thrill seeker where the greater the danger that is faced and conquered the greater the thrill that is achieved. This harmonious identity is achieved "... not only in fantasy, but also to a great extent, in reality" (Balint 1959: 86).

One of Simmel's (1971b) social types, the 'Adventurer', fits Balint's philobatic type very closely. Because the adventure stands over against the continuity of ordinary life, Simmel believes that it is like art, and so can reveal the 'secret unities' which are separated under rational analysis.

> ... the adventurer of genius lives, as if by mystic instinct, at the point where the course of the world and the individual fate have, so to speak, not yet been differentiated from one another (Simmel 1971b: 195).

Although not addressing risk-taking specifically, Huizinga's (1949) concept of 'sacred play' is another approach which resonates with Balint and Simmel. For Huizinga, as we have seen, play predates civilization (*sub specie ludi*) and can become lost under the layers of modernity's cultural complexities.

> In the form and function of play, itself an independent entity which is senseless and irrational, man's consciousness that he is embedded in a sacred order of things finds its first, highest, and holiest expression (Huizinga 1949: 17).

Consistent with Huizinga's (1949) notion of *sub specie ludi*, Katz (1988) and Rojek (1995) argue that the thrill of risk-taking is a significant motivation for criminal activity. Rojek (1995) suggests that the play factor is so important in crime that it should be looked at from a leisure studies perspective. Katz (1988) describes the thrill as stemming from walking a line between being in and out of control. The emotional extremes of eros[47] or thanatos can be achieved by 'pacifying' the risk-taker's subjectivity.

> He may then submit to forces that transcend his subjectivity even while he tacitly controls the transition. ... [B]y experiencing himself as an object controlled by transcendent forces, an individual can genuinely experience a new or different world. By pacifying his subjectivity, a person can conjure up a magic so powerful that it can change his ontology (Katz 1988: 8).

While Balint, Simmel and Katz have linked risk-taking and the transcendence of self, Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi (1988) have adapted Maslow's peak experience to develop their concept of 'flow', which explains the psychic process whereby this transcendence occurs. Flow theory argues that the achievement of these ecstatic moments - which they call 'optimal experience' - can be understood in terms of an harmonious match between challenge and skill:

> Whenever we are fully functioning, involved in a challenging activity that requires all our skill, and more, we feel a great sense of exhilaration. Because of this we want to repeat the experience. But to feel the same exhilaration again, it is necessary to take on a slightly greater challenge, and to develop slightly greater skills (Csikszentmihalyi 1988b: 367).

In line with the above, the thrill is universally described by surfers and other high risk sport participants as addictive (as discussed earlier in this chapter):

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[47] Eros is the Greek god which Nietzsche named as the synthesis between Apollo and Dyonisius (Turner 1996: 45)

> At one time a six-foot wave was pretty terrifying. Then, I got comfortable at that stage and an eight-foot wave was intimidating. And then a ten-foot wave challenged me, and so on. At one point, I was as comfortable riding twenty-foot waves as I had been riding six-footers. Surfing is like an addiction. You always need more size to satisfy you (Noll and Gabbard 1989: 150)[48].

The experience of 'flow' is often described as an ecstatic moment where, through a total involvement of the self in a particular activity, the subject and object merge in an exhilarating union:

> [T]he forces deployed [in mountaineering] are ... a means for momentary enjoyment, which comes from the exertion of all one's energies, from playing with danger and the emotion of the panoramic view. Indeed, I would place this enjoyment as the highest that life can offer (Simmel 1991: 97).

In surfing this union between the surfer and the wave can occur when the nature of the breaking wave is such that the surfer's abilities are pushed to the point where they have to perform automatically.

> When you abandon yourself to the rhythm of the wave and become part of that rhythm you get that arrested time ... The ecstatic moment is increased in intensity with an increase in size and the critical nature of the wave (Lynch interview 1995)

The shape and size of the wave combined with its speed and power, provides varying degrees of difficulty for the surfer, which can force the surfer to act so quickly and/or with such intensity of focus that there is no time/room for conscious decision making and the surfer loses consciousness of self as separate from the act of surfing the wave.

> When you're surfing big Waimea [Bay], you can't be thinking about anything - except for the moment. Which means that you're just there, in harmony with the universe. ... If you've got that moment, that's all you need. If you know that feeling of being here, now, you're set (surfer in Martin 1991: 112-3).

Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory attempts to link peak experience with challenge and skill in a way which is useful for the study of risk-taking, since risk can be a factor in increasing the challenge to an individual's skills. When the challenge is too great for the skills at hand it is said that

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[48] The description of risk-taking leisure as addictive is so common that Celsi et al. (1993) use a psychological theory of addiction, Opponent Process Theory, to help explain the phenomenon. In essence the theory suggests that the participant comes to associate the thrill with the fear and seeks increasing amounts of the agent - risk - to gain the high as the initial thrill becomes the norm. This does appear to have some congruence with the descriptions given by risk-takers (and Balint (1959)), but as Celsi et al. rightly point out, the theory is too unidimensional and lacks an account of the social in the process.

anxiety results and when the skills are greater than the challenge the participant becomes bored (Csikszentmihalyi 1988a).

Lyng (1990: 863) offers another interpretation of the experience with his concept of 'edgework'. He attempts to distinguish this concept from flow by arguing that edgework always involves the threat of death or injury, while flow experience occurs in the middle ground between boredom and anxiety. "[B]y definition, edgework involves the extreme state referred to by these [flow theory] authors as 'anxiety producing chaos'". He also claims that the sensations the two produce are different, as flow is said to involve a loss of self-consciousness while edgework "...stimulates a heightened sense of self and a feeling of omnipotence...".

Taking the latter point first, the descriptions of the experiences both Lyng and the Csikszentmihalyis describe have many things in common. For example, both claim that a distortion of time can be involved and both say that it can involve feelings of oneness with the objective surroundings. The discrepancy over a heightened sense of self or a loss of self-consciousness is in part at least a product of the 'ineffability' of the experience. The problem is compounded by Lyng however, when he interprets the loss of *self-consciousness* attributed to flow as a veritable *loss of consciousness*. The ecstatic nature of the experience of 'oneness with the objective world' can be described as either a loss of self or an expanded self, as this passage from Maslow illustrates:

> We become larger, greater, stronger, bigger, taller people and tend to perceive accordingly. ... To say this in a different way, perception in the peak experiences can be relatively ego-transcending, self-forgetful, egoless, unselfish (Maslow 1970: 62).

The same concept can be found in Slusher's (1967: 191) analysis of sport as a vehicle for transcending the self: "As man is free he absorbs his being and goes beyond himself, as he enters the self!". The paradoxical nature of the experience is also recognized by Simmel (1971c). He appears to adopt a Platonian notion of 'pure form' to explain his theory of the transcendent character of life; i.e. just as the pure form of beauty contains within it the contrast of the beautiful and the ugly, so the pure form of life (transcendent life) encompasses both 'more-life' and 'more-than-life' (Simmel 1971c: 368 - 369). Csikszentmihalyi's thesis is consistent with these authors when he claims that the 'true' self is manifest in the

experience of flow, not a diminished self, and "[b]ecause the tendency of the self is to reproduce itself ... to keep on experiencing flow becomes one of the central goals of the self" (Csikszentmihalyi 1988a: 24).

Lyng argues that edgework takes place outside the boundaries of flow experience, in the realm of anxiety and chaos. But fear cannot give way to a sense of 'exhilaration and omnipotence', as Lyng (1990: 860) claims, if the individual remains in a state of chaos induced anxiety. Ecstatic transcendence can only occur if the individual has 'the right stuff' to overcome the threat. In other words, if the individual has the skills - physical and mental - to meet the challenge (as for flow). Lyng's concept of edgework is restricted to the involvement of risk-taking in the achievement of peak experience, but contrary to his claims, this is fully entailed in the concept of flow: "...flow is not some stressless lacuna but a balanced, dynamic tension" (Mitchell 1988: 44). Risk is not a *necessary* component of flow but it can be a catalyst in the flow equation.

Mitchell (1988), like Lyng, attempts to bring a sociological perspective to risk-taking activity. Lyng does it through his concept of edgework and Mitchell does it through flow theory. Both believe that stress is an essential ingredient in the attainment of peak experience. It can only be achieved if the individual is able to "...follow the flight of hazardous processes, to surrender the self to forces beyond one's control" (Mitchell 1988: 57). Mitchell mobilizes two pathologies of modernity - alienation and anomie - as his analytic tools. Rather too simplistically, he equates boredom with alienation and anxiety with anomie, and claims that the alienated seek uncertainty in play while anomics will seek certainty.

Lyng also uses the concept of alienation, but in combination with Mead's concept of the self. Lyng's adaptation of alienation is more complex than Mitchell's and in fact includes the kind of anxiety the latter attributes to anomie. Lyng argues that those in alienating work who feel threatened by uncontrollable dangers - like those described in Beck's (1992) *Risk Society* - seek out threatening situations for their therapeutic value. This therapy is achieved via the loss of the 'Me' as the risk-taking activity leaves no time for imaginative rehearsal and the 'residual self' is liberated to act spontaneously and creatively. While Lyng is reluctant to declare this residual self the 'I' he claims that it does posses many of the same

characteristics: "[E]dgework calls out an anarchic self in which ego is manifest, but the personal, institutional self is completely suppressed" (Lyng 1990: 878). Csikszentmihalyi also uses Mead in the same way but does not share Lyng's reluctance and declares that "...the 'me' disappears during flow, and the 'I' takes over" (Csikszentmihalyi 1988a: 33). And from Slusher (1967: 90); "Through the freedom of the sport, man experiences his I as he has never before experienced the self".

The experience of self transcendence brought on by risk-taking activities has been recognized by scholars over a considerable period of time. The profound nature of the experience, as interpreted by these authors, explains the primary position which the search for thrills plays in risk-taking activities. The concept of flow provides an adequate framework through which to examine further the thrill-seeking and risk-taking activities of surfers. But before taking this examination back into the social and cultural realm, I discuss the above theories in the context of postmodernization.

*The Postmodern Context*

Maffesoli (1996: 75) claims that the present era is characterized by ecstatic self transcendence. And for Jameson postmodernity is characterized by free-floating euphoric states he calls the 'hysterical sublime':

> ... it is the body that is touching its limits, 'vocalized', in this experience of images, to the point of being outside itself, or losing itself. ... it is a kind of non-humanist experience of limits beyond which you get dissolved (in Ross 1989: 5).

For Cohen and Taylor (1992: 170-185) these momentary slips through the social fabric are a characteristic of this age more than any other. Given the depthless and fragile postmodern social fabric and the depthlessness and transience of the social self, I suggest that these momentary slips are not surprising. In the ideal typical postmodern setting the individual is confronted with a fluid, inconsistent and nebulous cultural soup in which the concept of a 'generalized other' (Mead 1965) is highly problematic. The 'Me(s)' which emerge in this context are similarly unstable, contradictory, nebulous and transient, and so, easily transcended. The 'I' therefore achieves a higher profile in the postmodern self. As Lash (1991: 174) argues, the two spheres of the modern psyche are now largely dedifferentiated in the postmodern 'psychic apparatus'.

The current trend of aestheticization is another factor which facilitates the ecstatic experience. Research in flow theory suggests that the experience cannot be achieved without the actions having significant meanings for the participant: "Activities that are trivial in substance or beyond the control of actors do not facilitate flow" (Mitchell 1988: 54). Similarly for Simmel (1971b), the 'adventure' had to have meaning for the participant and connect with their character and identity in order for it to provide transcendent experience. While we can rationalize risk-taking in terms of various efficacies, like catharsis and character building, along the lines of the 'rational recreationists' of early modernity (see Rojek 1995), Mitchell (1988) - in line with Simmel (1971b) and Huizinga (1949) - claims that this instrumental rationality restricts our ability to experience flow as the esoteric is explained away in the general disenchantment of everyday life. This he argues, has the potential to inhibit the flow experience.

The current level of aestheticization, which had its philosophical foundations in the work of Kant and Nietzsche, is based upon an understanding that all cognition is an aesthetic construct (Welsch 1997: 20-4). Bauman (1991: 188) appears to have recognized the role aestheticization plays in the liberation from the 'iron cage' of rationality when he described postmodernity as "... modernity emancipated from false consciousness". As Huizinga (1949) described it, the increasing complexity of civilization smothered us;

> ... under a rank layer of ideas, systems of thought and knowledge, doctrines, moralities and conventions which have all lost touch with play (Huizinga 1949: 75).

Rather than sinking into hedonistic chaos, aestheticization is characterized by the 'aesthetic reflexivity' discussed above (Lash 1993; Beck et al. 1994; Lash & Urry 1994), which has more in common with Weber's (1968: 24-5) affectual action or value-rationality rather than the instrumental rationality of modernity. With its emphasis on the body and the physical experience as part of the reflexive self, aesthetic reflexivity enables the sensual and emotional experience to be recognized as inherently worthwhile. The postmodern elevation of the aesthetic is therefore conducive to the cultural construction of flow experience.

As individuals become increasingly condemned to construct their own identities from an 'archive of styles' (Crook et al. 1992; see also Bauman 1991; Shields 1992b), the lived experience becomes more important and

the body becomes the one concrete mode of orientation (Bauman 1992; Giddens 1991).

> The body is the most proximate and immediate feature of my social self, a necessary feature of my social location and my personal enselfment and at the same time an aspect of my personal alienation in the natural environment (Turner 1996: 43).

For the risk-taker the bodily experience of flow confirms the existence of self, but in contrast with Turner, it is an expanded self, one in which the natural environment is no longer alien, but a constitutive part of the self. This self is anchored in an experience which transcends the illusion of a 'history' and social location at the core of the modern self, and which contradicts the notion of the postmodern self as depthless. It is a self which is not so much 'embedded' in 'place' in the traditional sense (see Giddens 1991)[49], but in the experience of the self in harmony with its external world; an embeddedness within 'the all', which, as Balint (1959) points out, is an anchorage based more in reality than fantasy.

Crook et al. (1992) describe the transition from traditional to modern, to postmodern society, in terms of increasing differentiation, commodification and rationalization. Another commonly recognized characteristic of this trajectory is increasing individualization. I suggest that the postmodern propensity for self transcendence can be depicted as following the pattern outlined by Crook et al. (1992) (see Fig. I).

Durkheim (1933) claimed that members of traditional communities were connected through a *conscience collectif* to each other in a mechanical solidarity, and that individualization (as differentiation from that connectedness) was a product of modernization. In the case of the modern individual, an increasing need for self construction constituted a hyperindividualization. In surfing's postmodern habitus, this hyperindividualization reaches a peak through self centred indulgence in bodily experience, whereby the self rediscovers its connection with the world beyond the body, in a process of deindividualization.

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[49] Place can be important in the surfing life, but through access to information and knowledge about the surfing possibilities world wide, global weather patterns and other seasonal changes, boundaries of place lose their relevance, both conceptually and physically. The internet is an important factor in this globalization; for example, access to long term swell forecasts for destinations around the world can be obtained, and surf trips to the most favourable locations can be arranged 'online' based on these forecasts.

The kind of self described above has also been labeled narcissistic. This narcissism does not allow for the construction of boundaries between the individual and the outside world. All external phenomena are interpreted in terms of their relationship with the individual, and the body and sensual experience becomes central to the construction of identity; "... experience which seems to tell about the self, to help define it, develop it or change it, has become an overwhelming concern" (Sennett in Giddens 1991: 171; see also Lasch 1991). The most disturbing consequence for these authors is the breakdown in meaningful social interaction and the failure to develop social bonds. The deindividualization mentioned above has consequences for this concept, and they will be explored in the following section.

*Section Summary*

Risk is shown to be a catalyst for ecstatic moments of communion with nature; a transcendence of self whereby the subject becomes one with the external world. In order to achieve these states the activity must have meaning for the individual, but the discourse in which this meaning is situated must not bury the pursuit of thrills beneath a rational order. Aestheticization releases the postmodern subject from the constraints of modern instrumental rationality, which allows for the ecstatic experience to be valued and pursued for its own sake.

Further, the fragile and fragmenting nature of the contemporary social fabric, and the concomitant processes of dedifferentiation, are fertile ground for the experience of self beyond its socially constructed boundaries. While a superficial interpretation of the pursuit of thrills might describe the postmodern selves involved as depthless and unstable, careering from one self affirming thrill to the next, an examination of the nature of the thrill has revealed the potential for it to provide an anchor for the self within an experience of oneness with the all.

Celsi et al. (1993: 2) say that an orientation towards risk-taking now pervades society, at least at the level of signs and symbols, and that the admonition to 'know thyself' has been replaced by the call to 'live life to the fullest'. I suggest that in the postmodern context the latter has become a means to achieving the former; through a hyperindividualistic

## Social Change Trajectories

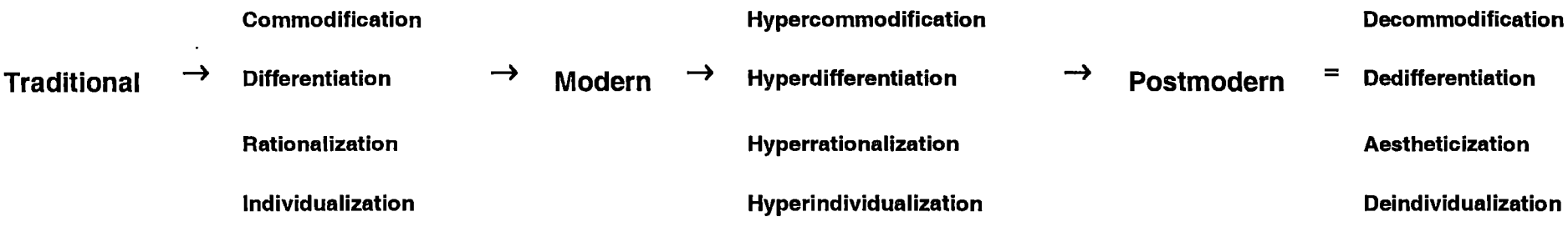


**Figure I:**
This diagram is based on Crook et al.'s (1992) postmodernization thesis. I have included the trajectory of increasing individualization which moves through hyperindividualization in the transition from modernity to postmodernity (e.g. the processes of self construction and alienation from family and community) to a deindividualization in the postmodern forms of neo-tribalism (see the following section on Social Formations for an explanation of neo-tribalism in this context).

engagement with the world, the 'true self' is discovered in self transcendent deindividualization.

Narcissism is also a potential consequence (or at least an alternative interpretation) of this aesthetic turn, but as we will see in the following section, the grounding which the transcendent experiences can provide the self, the de-individualization which it entails, and the communities which form around shared knowledge of these experiences, point to a different scenario.

## The Ecstatic Experience and its Implications for Social Formations

Just as the surfing habitus provides the meanings and the aesthetic in which risks are constructed and ecstatic experiences mediated, these experiences affect the nature of that habitus. In fact Bauman (1991: 191) argues that the identity of any postmodern 'habitat' is just as 'emergent and transitory' as the actions and meanings that form it. In this section I will analyze the effects which the ecstatic experience has on the formation and nature of surfing's social configurations.

Relevant theories of social formations are examined for their applicability to surfing - primarily Communitas, Bund, and Neo-tribalism. Drawing on these theories, a tribal metaphor is adopted to address the particularly stable nature of surfing's formations. This stability is found to be due to;

i) the level of commitment in time and effort participants expend in developing skills and in the pursuit of thrills;
ii) a three tiered social structure; and
iii) three categories of transcendence (foundational, cultural, and social) which correspond with the modes of transcendence (flow, *conscience collectif*, and sociality) evident in all three levels of the social structure.

At the micro level Celsi et al. (1993: 10-4) propose a model of evolving motives for risk-takers which "... become increasingly abstract and often transcendent as they evolve from experiment and thrill, through mastery and identity, to community and self-fulfilment". These 'transcendent motives' include the achievement of flow, and, adopting Turner's (1969)

concept of 'communitas', the transcendence of self in community based on the shared flow experience. Communitas is said to be experienced during states of liminality. A stage in Van Gennep's 'rites of passage', these transgressive liminal states occur when normative structures are overturned; between separation and re aggregation (Celsi et al. 1993; Hetherington 1994). During this transitory state everyday statuses are also overturned. As one of Celsi et al.'s informants said:

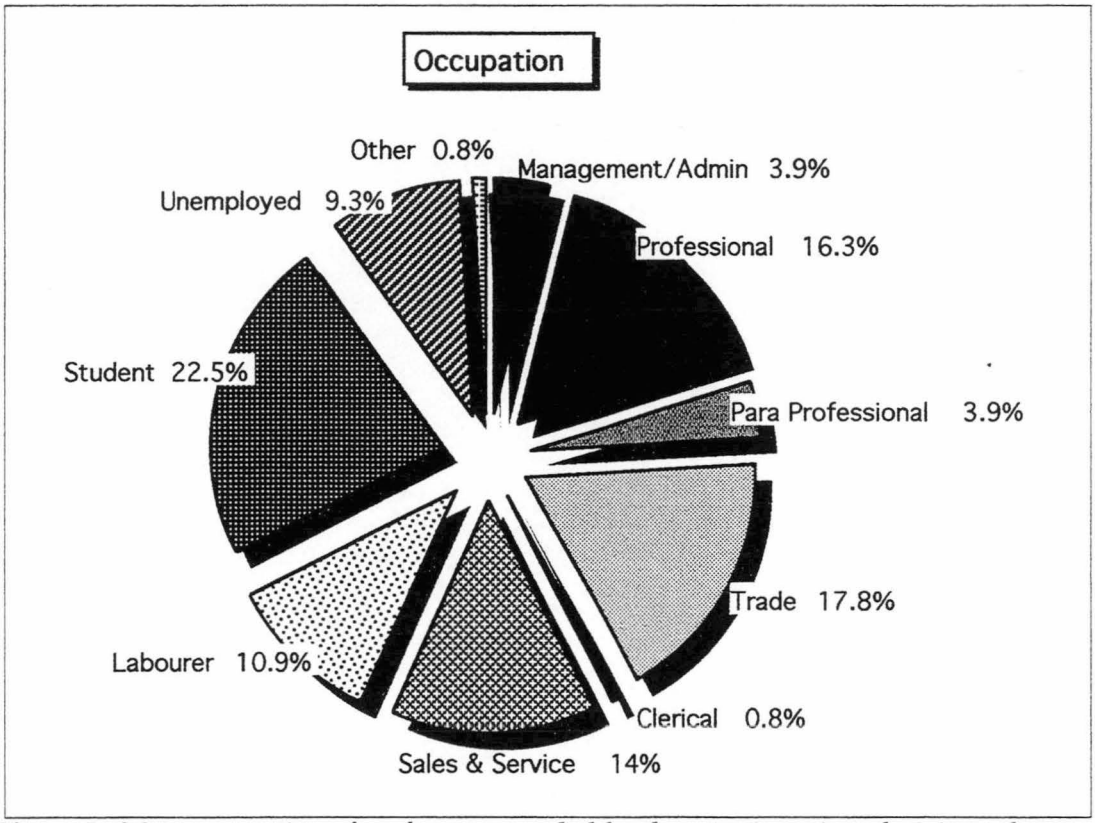


**Figure J:** Main occupation of surfers as recorded by the questionnaire administered as part of this study. This breakdown of occupations is not necessarily representative of the whole surfing population; however it is indicative of the diversity and spread across occupations from which the surfing population is drawn.

> Jumpers have a special kind of bond. You have your doctors, professors, lawyers, but you also have your truck drivers, bricklayers, and masons. Out here on the weekends none of this is a factor (Celsi et al. 1993: 12).

The same diversity is evident in surfing culture[50] (See Fig. J). Clearly the cultural baggage individual surfers bring from outside the subculture (e.g.

[50] At a desert location visited in the course of this study there were approximately 30 surfers and their families and companions. They came from the most diverse range of lifestyles and status groups; from the lawyer in his brand new four wheel drive and caravan to a group of unemployed surfers living in a sea cave. It was at this site that I met a classically trained pianist living off his publisher's advance while writing his second novel between surfing sessions. There were

education, ethnicity) can affect the way they interact with each other. But status and class are not characteristics which survive the transition from outside in any significant form.

Hetherington (1994) points out that communitas is an attempt to describe a kind of sociality which exists outside Tonnie's *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, and that Schmalenbach had previously done this in the 1920s, with his social form the *Bund*, (alternatively *communion* or *league*).

> A Bund can be defined as an elective form of sociation, in which the main characteristics are that it is small scale, spatially proximate and maintained through the affectual solidarity its members have for one another in pursuit of a particular set of beliefs (Hetherington 1994: 2).

Turner explicitly links communitas with flow when he says that it is comprised of a set of flow experiences (Hetherington 1994), and that it is itself an experience of 'shared flow' (Celsi et al. 1993). Schmalenbach sees the bund providing the same opportunities for self transcendence within the community:

> In this way hearts are merged in the blissful sobbing of salvation found in brotherhoods and cults of all kinds. ... The people are mixed together as they experience the highest raptures of the heart, uplifting inspiration, and sacrificial surrender ..." (In Hetherington 1994: 11-12).

The instability inherent in communitas - contingent upon its members being in a liminal state between one status and the next - was also recognized by Schmalenbach as a characteristic of bund, whose members are "... frequently to be reduced in a short time to flotsam and cast out in other directions ... [then] join together in other communions " (In Hetherington 1994: 11-12). Schmalenbach attributed three forms of social action (adapted from Weber) to each of three social forms; traditional - *gemeinschaft*, affectual - *bund*, and rational - *gesellschaft*. Following Weber's work on the routinization of charismatic leadership (which is said often to be a characteristic of bund formations), Schmalenbach ascribed the

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families, alternative lifestylers, seasonal workers, tradesmen. Some had been there for up to three years while others were on short holiday breaks. The highest status at the site belonged to the caretaker who had lived there for the past 13 years in a stone hut with his wife and now two young children. It was his commitment to this ascetic surfing life and ability in large surf which afforded him this status (his wife also surfed but not as often or at the same standard as her husband). As MacIntyre points out, "A man in heroic society is what he does" (in Featherstone 1995: 61).

instability of the bund to a tendency towards rational routinization and consequently transformation into forms of *gesellschaft*.

Up to this point Schmalenbach's explanation of the instability of the bund is consistent with Turner's use of liminality. But Schmalenbach argues that Weber wrongly understood affectual motivations as unconscious. He claims that feeling is a conscious phenomena that is "... neither simply rational nor irrational [but] affectual" (Hetherington 1994: 9). In doing so he provides for the reflexive management of the bund so that its members can resist the forces of rationalization. The bund members are not unconsciously pushed and pulled by their feelings and emotions until the inevitable rationalization of their play state awakens them to conscious action. They are consciously motivated by these feelings, such as solidarity and transcendent experience, which they value highly . This resonates with surfing culture, and the degree of conscious resistance to bureaucratization and sportization found in this study. Also the affectual/value-rational aesthetic reflexivity I have suggested is inherent in the surfing habitus generally.

Like Turner and Schmalenbach, postmodern approaches typically depict any community experience as transitory. Bauman (1992) for example, claims that any order which the postmodern individual experiences is the product of local, emergent and transitory sociality as opposed to the relative stability provided by modern social structures.

> All order that can be found is ... [like] a whirlpool appearing in the flow of a river, retaining its shape only for a relatively brief period and only at the expense of incessant metabolism and constant renewal of content (Bauman 1992: 189).

Maffesoli (1996) takes the same approach with his transitory neo-tribes, which he claims replace the mainstream social 'structure' with multiple sites of interactive 'processes'. His neo-tribalism involves small tribal groupings arrived at through the actions of people simply being together (e.g. concerts, bars, sporting events), the development of a collective consciousness which emerges, and the ecstatic transcendence of the self within the group. For Maffesoli membership of these neo-tribes is also transient and their existence unstable:

> In fact, in contrast to the stability induced by classical tribalism, neo-tribalism is characterized by fluidity, occasional gatherings and

> dispersal. ... the dramatic authenticity of the social is answered by the tragic superficiality of sociality (Maffesoli 1996: 76).

He claims that the transcendence of self is immanent in tribalism, but this transcendence is the result of playful sociality, the non-reflexive immersion in the moment, characterized by "... the disorderly babble of many tongues" (Featherstone 1995: 55). These neo-tribes are as transient and fluid as the sociality through which they are constituted. Maffesoli argues that there is a depth below the surface based on a shared aesthetic, but he does not plumb these depths enough to explain the relative stability (discussed below) of risk-taking lifestyle groups.

Simmel's (1971a) concept of 'sociability', which he described as the 'play-form of association', appears to be almost indistinguishable from sociality. Both are said to provide the possibility of transcendence, however Simmel saw the need for sociability to be anchored to 'real life' in some way:

> If sociability cuts off completely the threads which bind it to real life and out of which it spins its admittedly stylized web, it turns from play to empty farce, to lifeless schematization proud of its woodenness (Simmel 1971a: 139).

Here Simmel provides a key to understanding the transience and emptiness of neo-tribes, constituted as they are on the basis of individuals 'simply being together'. In contrast, the existential experience of 'real life' could hardly be more intensely felt than when risk-takers confront their own mortality, and experience ecstatic moments of 'primal harmony' with the external world. It is the shared knowledge of this transcendence which is the foundation of a *conscience collectif* linking surfers at a local and global level, and underpinning their moments of playful sociality[51].

### *A Tribal Metaphor*[52]

While all of the social formations canvassed above have elements in common with surfing (i.e. their connection with flow, their genesis in embodied experience, and the transcendence of the individual within the group) the bund goes closest to describing the surfing phenomenon with its aesthetically reflexive resistance to rationalization. However, like the others, the bund exists within a heady, euphoric atmosphere of

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[51] *Billabong*, a surfing industry company, appeals directly to this *conscience collectif* with its slogan 'Only a surfer knows the feeling'. Similarly Celsi et al. (1993: 13) report that all skydivers will say 'To experience it is the only way to understand it'.

[52] The following theoretical model is one which I have developed out of my research and experience as a surfer. I did not test the model as part of the research project.

camaraderie and singularity of purpose commensurate with its inherently transitory nature. While groups of surfers can and frequently do fit this description, it is not a full and adequate description of the subculture's social configurations. As I will demonstrate below, an identity as a surfer (as opposed to that of a pseudo-surfer; see Chapter 4 and Irwin (1973)) is not transitory. While membership of any particular group of surfers can be quite fluid, and the prominence of that identity can wax and wane, there is a sense in which this identity remains constant. And the same can be said of the social structure around which these identities are formed.

A tribal metaphor, different from Maffesoli's transient neo-tribes, can be used as a valid framework for the study of social forms within the surfing subculture. As discussed previously, bonds are forged amongst risk-takers through a shared appreciation of risk; arguably more commensurate with the lifestyles of primitive tribes than with the depthless sociality which emerges from the surface aesthetics of Maffesoli's transient neo-tribalism. The intensity of the experience and the commitment of time and resources to the lifestyles, and the development of skills needed to pursue them, contributes to the relative stability of these groups; which I have called 'grounded neo-tribes'[53]. Indicative of this is the fact that 50 percent of respondents to this study's questionnaire claim to have been surfers for 10 years or more, with 84 percent of all respondents surfing an average of at least once per week throughout the year[54]. One factor in the extent of commitment is the fact that the most intense experiences of flow are not all that frequent: "There is an ultimate moment in surfing, ... the whole thing only lasts a few seconds ... Sometimes it will only happen to you once in a season. Ah, but that once!" (surfer in Stone 1970: 55-6); "It's a foot-on-the-summit feeling, a sense of climax. It comes rarely, and the hope that it will come again soon keeps spurring you on" (Farrelly & McGregor 1967: 21). And from my interview with Peter*, an experienced surfer:

> You can go for months on the memory of one [great] wave and remember it for at least ten years. You can glow from just one good move that felt perfect (Peter* interview 1995).

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[53] These grounded neo-tribes are consistent with an 'oppositional postmodernism' which Lash (1990: 37-8) says is more oriented towards 'collective identity' rather than the isolated individualism of 'mainstream postmodernism' which corresponds with the 'tragic' transience of Maffesoli's neo-tribes.

[54] This level of commitment is indicative of the mostly core surfers survey across Australia.

Another factor is the unpredictable nature of the surf - 'no two waves are ever the same' - which means that the *potential* for achieving flow is always immanent:

> Its like one of the only things in life that you really, really can't master. ... You can become good but you're always like learning lessons and taking beatings, ... and I think that's what's really special about surfing to me (surfer in *The Moment* 1998).

The difference between transient and grounded neo-tribal formations can be seen clearly in Figure K. The transient neo-tribe is constituted by a playful sociality which provides the self with an experience of transcendence within the group at any particular time ($T_1$) and place they come together; i.e. at the school gate waiting with other parents to collect children, or in a vibrant nightclub. When the group disperses the sociality ends, and the transient neo-tribe ceases to exist. Through flow, the individual selves which make up the grounded neo-tribal group are anchored in experiences of transcendence within the physical world ($T_1$).The group is based upon the shared knowledge of the experience ($T_2$). This *conscience collectif* constitutes a transcendence of the participants within a self perpetuating social configuration. Transcendence within the social world is built upon transcendence within the physical world. The individuals' flow experience ($T_1$), and their knowledge that others in the group share both the experience and the knowledge of the sharing ($T_2$), fortifies the playful sociality which occurs during moments of group interaction ($T_3$).

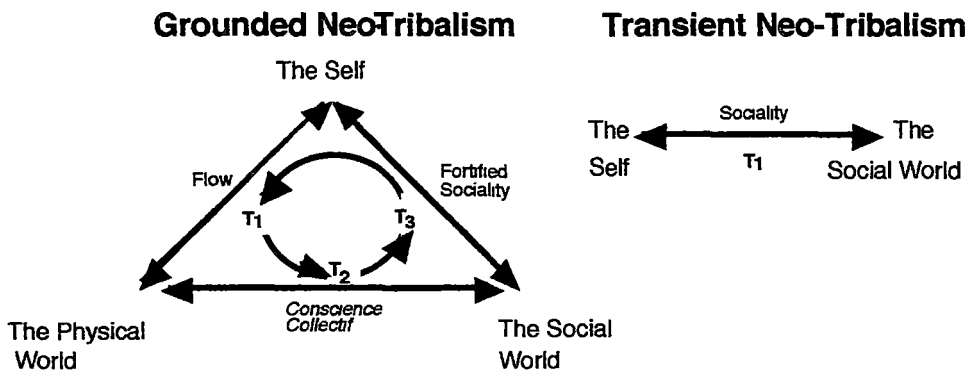


**Figure K:** The *Individual and Society* in postmodern tribal formations; the role of transcendent experience. The two-way arrows are indicative of the dedifferentiation inherent in the transcendent process

In surfing the cycle repeats and reinforces the social configuration even as individuals move in and out of the process. This stability can be illustrated through an adaptation of Bauman's (1991) whirlpool analogy. Bauman's transitory whirlpools are more like the eddies which appear and disappear, apparently randomly, in the wide, slow moving parts of a river. The social configurations of high risk leisure have more in common with the relatively permanent whirlpools which form in fast flowing rapids around stable physical features, only disappearing in times of flood or drought[55]. In fact Bauman (1991: 189) allows for some continuity in group formations, if only for a short time, via "... incessant metabolism and constant renewal of content"; precisely the situation I have illustrated in the diagrammatic representation of grounded neo-tribalism (Fig. K). Like the whirlpools in *my* analogy, the triangular configuration is more stable than the 'eddies' of unidimensional transient neo-tribalism[56]. But surfing's social structure has further dimensions to aid in its stability. This is best depicted as extending in two directions from a central tribe[57]:

**B a n d - T r i b e - N a t i o n**

All three of these group categories can be analysed in terms of the triangular configuration (Fig. K).

In addition to the above tripartite structure (which will be discussed in more detail ahead), there are three different, yet connected, categories of transcendence critical to its constitution. These I have called 'foundational', 'cultural' and 'social' transcendence. The foundational transcendence is experienced in flow and underpins surfing's social forms at all levels. The shared knowledge of this transcendence of the self within the physical world constitutes a fundamental *conscience collectif*, a cultural transcendence on a global level. This cultural transcendence also entails a process of adopting the identity of a group through its symbolic tokens, and eventually - although not necessarily[58] - the identity is

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[55] See Irwin (1973) for an account of 'flood' during California's surfing boom in the 60s, and Finney (1959) for an account of 'drought' as a result of colonialism in Hawaii at the beginning of the 20th century. Both these topics have also been summarized in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

[56] Taking into account the fact that flow does not require risk-taking (see the following chapter for further discussion on this point), a closer look at the activities around which some neo-tribes form may well reveal a similarly grounded formation to that of the above risk-takers.

[57] I am aware that the use of these three categories is inconsistent with their anthropological definitions. However, in the absence of any better terminology, and given the congruence with the tribal metaphor (already used in the context of postmodern social configurations) I have taken the liberty of appropriating them as defined in the following discussion.

[58] Following some theorists, the postmodern self would not take this substantive step, instead the depthless, motile and fragmented postmodern agent would simply continue to plunder symbolic

internalized through the shared cultural norms, language, tastes and values of a tribe. The social transcendence is experienced in the sociality of playful interaction between surfers. The other two categories of transcendence fortify this sociality because, as Simmel (1971a: 139) prescribed, they provide an existential foundation as well as the habitus within which the sociality occurs. The experience is therefore one of greater complexity than the depthless sociality of transient neo-tribalism, as all three categories of transcendence coalesce in moments of sublime sociality. These categories are manifest differently within the three social formations.

*The Band*

Part of surfing's mythology is the ideal surfing experience; an isolated spot sharing perfect waves with just a few friends. But the reality for most surfers is that their surfing is often carried out in crowded conditions where participants are typically uninterested in any playful social interaction. Instead they are focussed on the ocean for any sign that might give them an edge in the competition for the waves, and to avoid the relative dangers of their turbulent environment. Sociality is therefore more typically a feature of the surfing habitus out of the water[59].

Because the search for the perfect, uncrowded wave is such an integral part of surfing culture, the frantic pre dawn 'surf check' of the local beaches, and the 'surf trip' - which can range from weekends away to extended overseas sojourns - are activities which provide an opportunity for social bonding. The bands of surfers which form in this way consist of 2 to 6 surfers (any more than this and the band constitutes its own crowd)[60] and occasionally their non surfing partners. Apart from the occasional 'visitor', the band members will be usually be of similar ability and the same 'surfer type' - hardcore, core, recreational - since a parity of commitment and skill is essential for harmony in the search for thrills. The bands are not necessarily constituted from any particular sub-group

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tokens in a vain attempt at anchoring the self in the real (e.g. Crook et al. 1992; Bauman 1991; Baudrillard 1988b).

[59] When surfers do share good waves and/or uncrowded conditions the level of sociality in the water increases; although this may not necessarily involve an increase in verbal interaction.

[60] Lone surfers (often accompanied by their non-surfing partners) are not uncommon, and for these surfers the important role described here for the Band is provided, to different degrees, through interaction with other surfers, in the water and on the beach. For these surfers the boundary between the Band and the Tribe is even more ambiguous.

(see *The Tribe* below) (such as bodyboarders or club members), sex or age (although age is commonly a differentiating characteristic).

It is within these bands that the most intense experiences of surfing (the anticipation, disappointment, fear and thrills) are shared most intimately, and where myths and legends have their foundations, and sacred sites discovered. Due to conflicts or other incompatibilities such as different skill levels, an individual's diminished availability for trips, the cultural expectations in the locality, or the machinations of status acquisition, the membership of bands can be quite fluid, with individuals moving reasonably freely between them. On the other hand, where members remain compatible the bands may become very long term and stable arrangements.

In the band the foundational transcendence is regularly reconstituted through *witnessing* the ecstatic moments of others and *experiencing* it personally[61]. The band's habitus is the site of the embodied (foundational) experience which is the primary source of surfing's *conscience collectif*. The particular habitus of the band is however, like a storm far out at sea where the swell is wild and erratic. While the members can experience euphoric peaks of transcendence, they can also suffer from troughs of frustration through fruitless journeys, poor performances and long periods without swell, as well as the petty clashes, rivalries and tensions which can emerge out of these frustrations.

*The Tribe*

The members of bands (and lone surfers) belong to a more abstract tribal community based on territory. Particularly in areas where there are large, dense surfing populations (like Sydney and the Gold Coast) the tribes may consist of subgroups based on categories like the kind of surf craft used (e.g. longboard or bodyboard), lifestyle orientation (e.g. soul surfer or club member), and various combinations of these. Tribes share territory with these various subgroups, which (in urban areas) may congregate in bands, so understandably tribes can be conflict ridden. A tribe's territory is either situated around a local beach or surf spot (particularly in urban areas), or, more commonly, they are constituted

[61] As will be explained later, the distinction between 'witnessing' and 'experiencing' becomes blurred in a significant way.

within a broader area of coastline which provides opportunities for surf in a variety of weather and swell conditions - their 'hunting grounds'. Some coastal areas are rich in surf locations and regular swells, others are not so blessed and for the latter the size of the hunting grounds can be quite large (several hundred km). These tribal grounds can overlap; e.g. when a small tribe is based at one beach or group of beaches within the broader hunting grounds of another, or where different tribes share territory in remote areas between population centres. Similarly, subgroups which locate themselves in a small area can conflict with the other members of their tribe over access to their particular patch, while still participating in the broader tribal culture.

Another important feature which defines the tribe as distinct from any subgroups is the degree to which it is culturally and socially self sustaining. All tribes include gathering places as part of their territorial habitus (e.g. pubs, cafes, surf shops, areas of a beach, car parks etc.). The tribal setting - whether it be the pub, territory in the school yard, or a corner at any social gathering - is relatively remote in time and space from the foundational transcendence of the band. Cultural transcendence is constitutive of this formation (while always remaining under construction) and the foundational and cultural are reaffirmed and reinforced in the social interaction. An important component of this process is the story telling; reliving the ecstatic moments of flow and the other highs, lows and incidentals which constitute their surfing life. This is clearly demonstrated by the following quote first used earlier in this chapter:

> That release is incredible. I've heard it from everybody else. You can see the goosebumps on their bodies when they talk about it. My adrenalin comes up just from talking about it (surfer in Lyon & Lyon 1997: 140)[62].

These gatherings can and often do provide an atmosphere in which the band's tensions dissipate and playful sociality dominates. The wild seas of the band's habitus transform into a more distinctive swell pattern -

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[62] The same phenomenon has also been reported by Natalier (1996) for motorcycling:

> The sharing of motorcycling stories is not simply a trading of anecdotes between strangers. The words correspond, albeit imperfectly, to a valued experience. The eyes shine, the body shifts in remembered manoeuvres, the hands once again grip the handle bars. ... Through retelling the moment and the experience, the motorcyclist perceives others' reactions and on the basis of these reactions, reinterprets and incorporates the experience (Natalier 1996: 18).

more orderly and predictable - as it travels through the transition from band to tribe. The rough surface becomes more even in the storytelling, and myth making, and through the social agitation of a more populated and abstracted habitus, the surfing aesthetic is refined .

*The Nation*

Together the tribes constitute the most abstract of the social forms - the surfing nation. Based, like the other forms, upon the foundational transcendent experience, this is essentially an aesthetically constituted nation; global in nature rather than geographically specific. The surfing media provide a surfing specific arena in which a universal surfing habitus is constituted, and from which tribes, bands and individuals deviate, more or less. While the styles, tastes and other cultural trappings of the many tribal groups vary, the surfing media - in film, video, books and magazines - provides a (hypercommodified) forum for the construction of meaning and the development and maintenance of a surfing aesthetic, a *conscience collectif*, on a global scale.

It is at this level that surfing culture can be interpreted as an 'imagined community' which, according to Crook et al. (1992: 133), is "... *simulated* via mass mediated images, mass spectacles, and even quantitative (i.e. mass) social science". For Bauman (1992: xix) - as with Crook et al. - these communities are unstable, and without institutional support they tend to be fickle and short-lived. Stedman (1997: 78) claims that this level of community is all that there is to surfing; "It can now be argued that the subculture as it is simulated through the magazines and films *is* the surfing culture". But as I have shown above, surfing's social structure has far more depth than this, and while it doesn't have institutional support in the sense of a controlling body[63], it has a thriving 'grass roots' culture industry[64], including a well patronized media sector.

While Bauman (1992: 36) recognizes the significance of shared activities as a basis for these communities he fails to take account of the embodied experience and its consequences for them. As I have shown, surfing's

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[63] *Surfing Australia Inc.* has little or no significance for the vast majority of surfers outside its role behind the production of surfing's professional media stars, and the level of mainstream acceptance of surfing which stems from their public relations efforts.

[64] The surfing culture industry has emerged from within the subculture, and its significance in the construction and maintenance of surfing's subcultural integrity is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

social forms are not simply transient moments of sociality, nor are they purely hyperreal media constructions. While these elements exist within the broad surfing habitus, the sociality and simulated experience is grounded in a concrete reality; like the physical features behind the whirlpools of high risk lifestyles, rather than Bauman's apparently random, fleeting eddies of transient sociality.

The surfing nation is created primarily through the surfing media, and confirmed in the interaction of travelling surfers. Through the media's pictures, films and stories the foundational transcendence is mediated to surfers on a global scale. The media also presents a catalogue of surfing styles in areas like language, dress, attitudes, and surfing itself, from which the individual surfers and their groups draw inspiration (in line with the cultural studies approach to the reflexive appropriation of cultural goods; see Chapter 7). More important though (because of the link with foundational transcendence) is the development of an appreciation of the sublime in nature. Through photography and film the surfing media have played a significant role in the development of a global *conscience collectif* where the boundaries between foundational and cultural transcendence break down (see next chapter).

Surfers detached for various reasons from their tribal habitus (e.g. when travelling), are connected in the context of this global nation, in a fortified sociality which, perhaps because of the lack of a recognized tribal setting (and its complexities) the *conscience collectif*, can be amplified and provide moments of communion to rival any other. The surfing nation links the tribal formations by mediating the knowledge of shared ecstatic experience on a global scale. Here, remote from the turbulence of surfing as a stormy band activity, and the heady sociality of surfing's cultural activities, the *conscience collectif* is most refined and abstract. At this global level the culture's patterns and symbols are recognized by surfers and many non-surfers alike; but the *conscience collectif* provides an anchor in the foundational transcendence hidden from outsiders, whose interaction with the surfing subculture is restricted to this stylized surface - because 'only a surfer knows the feeling'!

*Solidarity in the Social Forms*

The feelings of community which surfers experience are based upon shared knowledge of ecstatic moments of foundational transcendence. These moments stem from an 'addictive' activity which requires a long term commitment of time and resources, and the social formations which result are, as I have argued, quite stable. The flow experience underpins all levels of surfing's social formations, and the *conscience collectif* and sociality inherent in these forms sustain them between the infrequent but more intense moments of ecstatic flow.

Within any given 'hunting ground' there can be nomadic travelers, outsider bands on surf trips, and a variety of subgroups; some of them antagonistic towards each other. Through the kind of 'localism' discussed in the previous chapter, surfers can become violent towards 'outsiders' who encroach on their territory. Also tribal groups who share the same hunting grounds can become aggressive toward each other, and the same is true of bands within the tribal setting.

Rojek (1995: 152) reminds us that postmodernism rejects the notion of solidarity as a concrete reality. It is an illusion"... a mythological sign in the sign-economy", and at best a short lived distraction. If the surfing habitus(es) includes a form of solidarity, clearly it is not simply a mechanical solidarity based on a shared historical tradition; nor is it an organic solidarity based on the division of labour. It is better described as an affectual solidarity, based on shared knowledge of embodied experience; of transcendence of self within the physical, cultural and social worlds. This at a time of rapid and uncertain change; of hyperindividualizing influences and fragmentation; of disembeddedness and 'Risk Society'. This is a solidarity which emerges out of hyperindividuality; out of operating on the edge - edgework if you like (Lyng 1991) - both in the sense of the risk-taking activity, and in the sense of the social and cultural upheaval in which it has emerged. This form of solidarity, like the continuity of sociation it is linked to, is contingent upon the shared activity, as Bauman (1992), Maffesoli (1991 & 1996), Turner (1969), and Schmalenbach (1977) have argued. But rather than the transient solidarity they describe, I have shown that a continuity of shared activity is inherent in surfing culture.

To draw on a well worn maxim, solidarity is real if it is real in its consequences. The solidarity of surfers is of a kind prone to intense, short life - as when people come together in times of crisis or rapture - but the aesthetic mode and uncertainty of postmodernization provide the conditions in which the emotion is continually renewed. This solidarity is not characterized by self sacrifice for the sake of the group or individual members of the group[65]; rather it is characterized by self sacrifice for self transcendence. This hyperindividualistic activity provides the basis for group interaction and so, in the postmodern context, self-centred hedonism acquires an ethical dimension through its role in the construction and maintenance of group solidarity; from hyperindividualization to deindividualization (see Fig. I).

*From Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft*

The model presented above places the experience of flow at the very heart of surfing's social formations. But a social formation which springs from shared experience such as this will not necessarily continue to rely on the experience for its existence, nor even continue to recognize it as significant. The rationalization of these experiences can explain away the moment in the modern disenchantment of everyday life (Mitchel 1988), as Neitz and Spickard (1990) found in their study of flow and religious experience:

> We are not likely to find individuals experiencing *samadhi* in the Assemblies of God, nor entering "the seventh dwelling place" among Presbyterians. Flow experiences are culturally transformed - before and after the fact (Neitz & Spickard 1990: 24-5).

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[65] Neither is it characterized by political mobilization. Environmental organizations like the Surfrider Foundation, although supported by *Surfing Australia Inc.* (interview with Alan), are mostly peripheral to the surfing culture. In this study only 9% of questionnaire respondents were members of Surfrider Foundation, and none were members of any other surfing based environmental organization (67% of respondents who are Surfrider Foundation members are also members of *Surfing Australia Inc.*, the SLSA, or a Boardrider club - 55% higher than the average membership of these organizations). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Surfrider Foundation does not have a broad membership base amongst core surfers, rather membership is sought as a 'symbolic token' by pseudo-surfers, neophytes and recreational surfers, and other non surfers with an interest in promoting the organizations environmental agenda also contribute to the membership: "Surfers are wary of environmentalists jumping on the surfing bandwagon as a marketing tool and are disinclined to join organizations anyway" (Baker interview 1997). Notwithstanding the above, it is true that surfers have an interest in environmental issues relating to the ocean, and when the quality of the environment in which they surf is directly threatened collective action has occurred. This natural affinity with environmental issues may mean that surfers are particularly active in these issues, but this is an activity which typically takes place outside the surfing lifeworld. The reason for this lack of political solidarity is perhaps best attributed to the hedonistic nature of the culture and the heterogeneity of the surfing population.

In the previous section I outlined the negative effect that rationalization of ecstatic experience can have on an individual's ability to achieve flow, and the positive effect of aestheticization. The meanings which reflect the various shades of this dialectic are socially constructed, and as the above quote from Neitz and Spickard illustrates, the interpretation of the experience arrived at through social interaction has consequences for the individual's ability to continue experiencing flow. It follows that any disenchantment or delegitimization of the ecstatic experience will affect the nature of the social formation involved because it will no longer be contingent upon the experience.

Celsi et al. (1993: 14) say that the thrill of skydiving loses its motivational importance and its intensity with continued participation, and the experience of transcendence *within the group* becomes the primary motivation for risk-taking. Their claim is not supported by my research however (see Fig. L), nor that of Ewert (1994). Only 16% of all respondents mentioned social aspects as a motivation for surfing (e.g. friends; companionship).

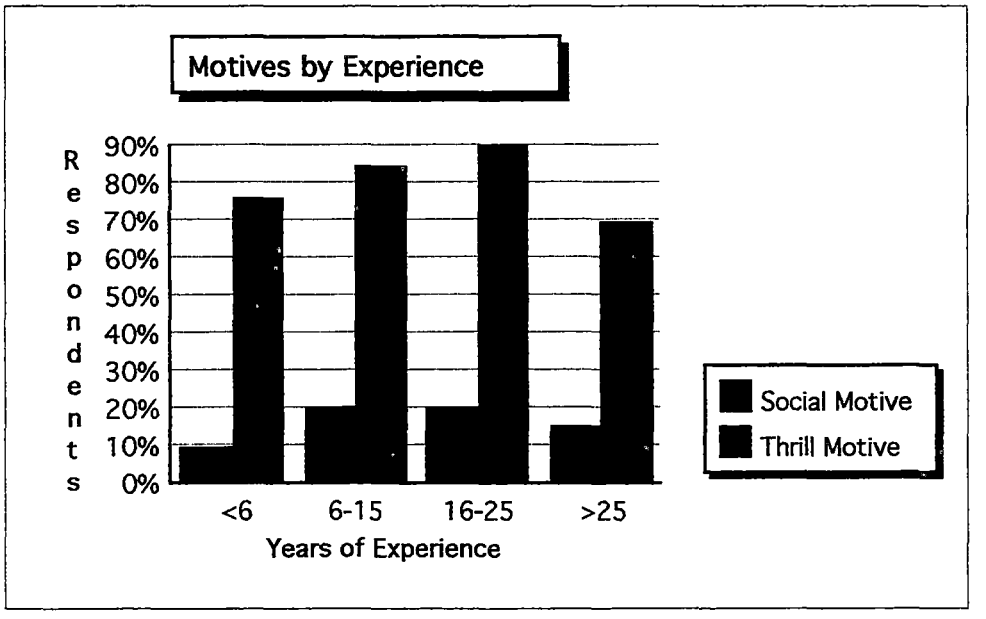


**Figure L:** Data drawn from the questionnaire administered as part of this study.

While there is an increase in those mentioning social aspects as a motivation for surfing from 9% - for those with less than six years experience - to 20% - for those with between six and 25 years experience - the social motivation does not threaten to overtake the thrill of the experience at any stage. The decline in the percentage of surfers who

nominated the social as a motivation for surfing to 15% - for those with 26 years experience or more - is probably a function of the withdrawal of older surfers from the surfing 'scene'.

These figures clearly question Celsi et al.'s (1993) claim that over time the thrill of the activity will be superseded by the importance of social interaction as a motivation for continued participation. Instead what we find is that (unless you have been surfing for 26 years or more) the longer you have been surfing the more likely you are to count the thrill as a motivation for your continued participation. This is consistent with Ewert's (1994) study of high altitude mountaineers:

> The data suggests that as climbers grow in experience, they appear to move along a continuum of motivating factors ... to those items that had greater intrinsic and autotelic meaning (exhilaration and self expression) (Ewert 1994: 15).

The reversal of this trend after 26 years as a surfer occurs at the same time as a decline in the social as a motivation. Surfers with this much experience are more likely to have acquired the ability to achieve the less intense 'mature' flow mentioned earlier (to be discussed in detail in the following chapter). This phenomenon is particularly significant because it enables the transcendent experience of flow to retain its foundational significance for surfing's 'elders'. The experience contingent nature of surfing's social formations is therefore not threatened by aging surfers making the transition from active surfer to sports administrator; even at a time when, as a concession to physical decline (amongst other imperatives), fewer risks are taken.

Celsi et al. (1993) recognize flow as the basis for the group *conscience collectif*, but their model follows the same modern imperative towards greater rationalization outlined by Schmalenbach, whereby the ecstatic experience is threatened with irrelevance and eventual atrophy as the group becomes "... an end in itself" (Celsi et al. 1993: 14), alienated from its foundational transcendence. The options for such a group would appear to be for it to either whither and disperse, as with the transient neo-tribes, or if this 'end in itself' has enough momentum, to evolve into a stable *gesellschaftlich* social form.

While there are other problems with the moves which Celsi et al. (1993) make in their argument,[66] the disparity between their model and the findings of Ewert (1994) and I may stem mainly from the fact that their study focussed on club activities, while Ewert's and mine did not. As has been covered above, rationalization is said to be the enemy of flow, and in a case where the evolution of a risk-taking lifestyle is characterized by bureaucratization it is possible that the ecstatic experience may be devalued in the way Celsi et al. describe.

Typically, any leisure activity which operates within a bureaucratic framework provides a career path for members enabling them to eventually withdraw from participation - at least at the cutting edge - and involve themselves more in the running of the organization and its various functions. In these organizations competition is typically the focus of activities. The aging competitor will find diminishing satisfaction as their ability wanes, and the bureaucratic model provides alternative avenues for continued activity, status and camaraderie.

As discussed in Chapter 4, surfboard riding clubs were formed in response to the mainstream backlash against surfing's rebellious 'hooliganism' and the dangers surfboards posed to the rest of the bathing public. While these were mostly short lived institutions, some did survive in the urban beach areas where lifesaving clubs had provided the dominant model of beach culture for many decades. The club oriented surfer is almost inevitably also a competitive surfer. Competition and socializing is their *raison d'etre.* As the president of one of the oldest surfboard riding clubs in Australia said, "Anyone can be a good free surfer but competition brings out the best in you" (Reid interview 1995). While the reasons for club membership (e.g. facilities, competitions, social life) and the level of commitment to them varies (from a self interested casual involvement to an altruistic dedication to 'the club' for its own sake) an orientation towards instrumental rationality is indicative of the ethos of

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[66] Celsi et al.'s (1993) 'evolution of motives' model states that through a process of normalizing fear, the thrill will lead to pleasure and fun, and further, with mastery of the sport, to the transcendent experience of flow. But flow results from a challenge to skills significant enough to force the participant to lose themselves in the act; if anything this is easier to achieve for the novice as their level of skill is so readily challenged. Further, they wrongly differentiate between the experience of thrills and flow. While the two are not inseparable, flow is not at the top of a hierarchy of experience, with thrills at the bottom. Flow is more thrilling the more intensely it is experienced - and this is especially a characteristic of risk-taking leisure (see Schueller 2000).

the club scene; especially at the administrative level: "The club is only as good as its administration" (Reid interview 1995). While only 12 percent of my questionnaire's respondents (not chosen specifically for their club membership) belonged to a local surfboard riding club[67], the clubs are more significant than this level of participation suggests. It is *through* them that competitive surfing has flourished (Reid and Atkins interviews 1995; see also Bartholomew & Baker 1996).

The combination of club bureaucracy and athleticization constitute a level of order and internally imposed constraint to surfing which is alien to the culture beyond the club enclaves of the mostly urban beaches. The opportunity for flow would appear to be diminished for those surfers situated within this *gesellschaftlich* habitus. While Figure M shows the kind of differences one might expect - club members are less likely to consider the thrill of surfing and its cathartic properties as motives for participation, and they are more likely to consider the social aspects and physical fitness as motives - however the difference between the two is not that great, and the embodied experience remains the most prominent factor in both groups, with the social a long way behind. A thorough analysis of this phenomenon is undertaken in Chapter 8.

*Section Summary*

Surfing's social forms have many properties in common with the transient and ecstatic groups described by Maffesoli (1991 & 1996), Turner (1969), and Schmalenbach (1977), but they are not transient. The importance of the media in surfing culture is consistent with the concept of imagined communities, but there is something beneath the surface image which is hidden to the outsider. While surfing's social forms have the outward appearance of these typical postmodern entities, there are three basic fundamental differences:

i) they are based on embodied experience of transcendence which is the foundation of that which occurs subsequently within the group;
ii) this embodied experience is perpetuated through the dynamic between individual and society - i.e. through the impetus of the self striving to continue experiencing the self, and through the social

[67] This figure is arrived at after taking out data from two sites where club members were specifically targeted. The remaining data is from a variety of location types; all of which had boardriding clubs in the area, except one, and at this remote campsite club membership was above average at 22%.

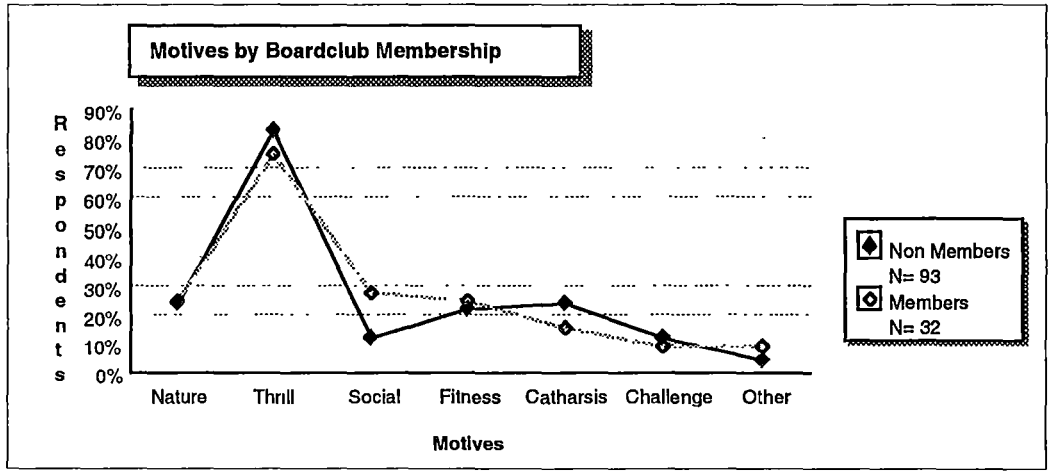


**Figure M:** Data drawn from the questionnaire administered as part of this study.

*Motive Categories*~*:*
*Nature* - the interaction with or appreciation of nature associated with surfing activities.
*Thrill* - the thrilling experience of surfing.
*Social* - the friendship and social interaction.
*Fitness* - the physical fitness benefits gained through the activity.
*Catharsis* - the mental health benefits gained through the activity - e.g. stress relief; satisfaction.
*Challenge* - rising to the challenge to skills posed by the waves and/or competition.
*Other* - responses which did not fit any of the above categories - e.g. money; 'something to do'.

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~ These categories were adapted from Kenyon's (1968) motives for sport as a 'socio-psychological phenomenon'. The data was taken from an open ended question which asked the respondent why they continued to surf. Respondents who were members of the SLSA and not also members of a boardriding club were excluded from the calculations. Members of bodyboard clubs were included as boardclub members.

iii) forms which are constantly renewed by the striving and the experience, and which reinforce and provide the meanings through which the experiences are interpreted and valued; and through the perpetuation of this foundational ecstatic activity they resist the modern trajectory towards *Gesellschaft*[68]. .

I have presented this self-perpetuating process in Figure K and pointed out that the pattern is equally constitutive of all three levels of surfing's social forms; the Band, Tribe and Nation. This three layered social structure bonded by the three categories of transcendence - Foundational, Cultural and Social - provides further depth and stability to the surfing habituses.

## Chapter Summary

Surfing is an example of a risk-taking leisure activity; it offers the possibility of intense experiences of both fear and euphoria, providing the kind of mimetic and cathartic experience Elias (1986) described as central to the development of sport in modernity, in an intensified hyperindividualized form for 'risk society'. But at the micro level leisure time risk-taking is essentially a search for thrills. The 'peak experience' which these thrill seekers crave is an ecstatic transcendence of self in union with the external world. First experienced as an infant, the feeling of oneness is lost in the rational ordering of life, but this 'true self' can be revisited momentarily through the intensity of focus beyond the self induced by risk-taking activities. Such activities are unlikely to be acceptable to the ideal type modern individual, but in the context of the current postmodern mode of aestheticization Lash's (1993) aesthetic reflexivity proves useful in explaining the increasing popularity of high risk leisure (see also Lash & Urry 1994; Beck et al. 1994).

Both increases in risk-taking for leisure, and the reflexive risk management addressed by Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992), can be understood as two different responses to the postmodern breakdown of the social structure and increasing levels of individualization. While the lack of trust in rational bureaucratic systems and in the promises of science have contributed to increased levels of the reflexive management

[68] The importance of internal reflexivity to this process is explicated in the following chapters

of the self, at the same time this breakdown in the modern social structure provides opportunities for grounding the unanchored selves of postmodernity in transcendent experience. The aestheticization of everyday life helps fill the gaps in that social fabric and in doing so facilitates a more hermeneutic framework for the construction of self and identity. This framework grounds the self in bodily experience, as opposed to the historical categories and future orientation of modernity. Risk-taking acts as a catalyst for the experience, and the social formations which stem from these activities provide a model and a source of meaning for the development of other social groupings grounded in a shared knowledge of ecstatic union with the external world. The surfing subculture's social formations - band, tribe, and nation - provide an alternative to the transience of Schmalenbach's (1977) bund, Maffesoli's (1996) transient neo-tribes, and Turner's (1969) communitas, while at the same time avoiding to a significant extent the modern trajectory towards *gesellschaft* .

The experience of the ecstatic expanded self is manifest;

*i)* in the thrill of risk-taking (foundational transcendence);

*ii)* in the shared knowledge of the transcendent experience (cultural transcendence); and

*iii)* the grounded neo-tribal groupings which form around it (social transcendence).

The aestheticization which facilitates this transcendence of self rolls back the disenchantment of everyday life, and inherent in its challenge to the cognitive rational framework is the possibility that the ecstatic experience becomes easier to achieve. In the context of the postmodern breakdown of the social, these 'breakthroughs' are even more likely.

## CHAPTER 6
## FEAR, DESIRE & A POSTMODERN SUBLIME

> *Here I am, a little animal called a man ... Against me are the great natural forces ... the sea, the wind and the wave. ... In the maze and chaos of the conflict of these vast and draughty Titans, it is for me to thread my precarious way. ... The bit of life that is I will exult over them ... will feel godlike. It is good to ride the tempest and feel godlike. I dare to assert that for a finite speck of pulsating jelly to feel godlike is a far more glorious feeling than for a god to feel godlike* (Jack London in *The Cruise of the Snark* first published in 1911).

In the previous chapter I discussed the link between the ecstatic self transcendence experienced through risk-taking, and the creation and maintenance of grounded neo-tribal configurations. In this chapter I examine in more detail the surfing aesthetic which has emerged out of the subculture's reflexive social formations; in particular the meanings attached to risk-taking and communion with nature through the development of a postmodern appreciation of the sublime, and the implications of this for surfing's social configurations.

First I examine the way the development of a risk oriented surfing aesthetic can facilitate self transcendence without the need for risk or challenge. Next I argue the case for the emergence of a postmodern sublime and the manner in which this particular incarnation of the sublime facilitates risk-taking behaviour, and hence contributes to the stability and continuity of surfing's social formations. I then examine the role of the surfing media in this process and in the creation of a global *conscience collectif* based on the shared ecstatic experience simulated in their images of the sublime. Finally I discuss the ethical implications for the surfing subculture of its hedonistic aesthetic.

### Achieving Flow Without Risk, Skill or Challenge

The addictive nature of risk-taking and the important role danger can play as a catalyst for ecstatic experience might suggest that these elements are indispensable to the achievement of flow. Le Breton (2000: 8), for example, claims that without at least the feeling of risk-taking "...the

undertaking would give neither enjoyment, nor have such an effect on personal life". In this section I argue that neither risk nor challenge are necessary factors in the achievement of flow; it can be experienced in activities as mundane as reading books and watching television (Massimini et al.: 1988).

Many of the experienced surfers I interviewed suggested that while large or dangerous surf can offer intensely thrilling experiences, they are able to achieve the same sort of experience - although not as intensely - in smaller waves (e.g. Austen; Young; Burridge; Carroll; John* & Phil*; Eddy*; Greg*; and Peter*). One means of achieving this is by attempting to perform at a higher level of skill; e.g. attempting more difficult maneuvers. But many of these surfers also described a loss of self in a less intense approach to surfing:

> Surfing is a lot like being rocked in your mother's cradle; it makes you feel safe and comfortable. Then a set [series of large waves] comes and your senses explode. The rush you get attracts you to bigger and bigger waves. ... [But] you can get the buzz on small waves ... The smells and the feelings of surfing are what make it unique; you're really amongst it (Austen interview 1995).

In this section I address this phenomenon and how it relates to the risk oriented nature of surfing culture.

Risk acts as a catalyst for the flow experience when it increases the challenge and when that challenge is not greater than the participant's psychological and physical ability to meet it, but is still great enough to push the participants' skills to the point where they become totally immersed in the act of meeting the challenge. But challenge and risk are not inseparable. A musician can achieve flow when challenge and skill are matched without any risk of physical harm. Also, risk which is not directly involved in challenging the ability of the participant to perform the desired activity is not a positive factor in the achievement of flow (as illustrated in the case of surfing with sharks). In fact it can be an inhibiting factor if it distracts the participant from the desired activity. The risk of physical harm can inhibit flow when awareness of it dominates the participant's consciousness to the point where the fear is not overcome. Risk only acts as a catalyst to the achievement of flow when it serves to focus the participants more intensely on their desired activity rather than distracting them from it.

It could be said that musicians risk psychological trauma should they fail to meet the challenge of a difficult piece. This risk occurs in sport as well; reputations and status are at risk as well as the participant's own feelings of self worth and general psychological well being. These risks are not directly involved in challenging the participant on a physical level and threaten to inhibit flow by imposing on the consciousness of the participants thus distracting them from the intensity of concentration necessary for the loss of self. On the other hand, such psychological risks may also serve to focus the participants' concentration on the desired activity and in so doing act as a catalyst to the flow experience[69]. The challenge must first be met positively at the psychological level (through adequate mental skill) in order for this to occur.

Apparently there are two arenas of challenge the participant faces in any risk-taking activity - the psychological and the physical. The presence of risk in either can provide a catalyst or an inhibitor to flow. First the psychological challenges must be overcome; and second, once the psychological hurdles are crossed the way is clear for the physical challenge to be met (the time lapse between the two may be immeasurably short). The distinction between the physical and the psychological is clearly problematic however, in that physical factors (including physical fitness) will affect the acceptance or rejection of the psychological challenge, and psychological fitness will affect the success or failure of the physical challenge. Further, there need not be any significant physical challenge; thrill-seeking can be a purely intellectual pursuit:

> Einstein was way beyond the handrails ... He was literally creating his own new vision of the Universe. What sustained his mental life was the thrill of it all (Farley in Schueller 2000: 23).

But book readers and television watchers who achieve flow are doing so with no significant challenge to skills (physical or intellectual) or any necessary risk of physical or psychological harm. This was an anomaly for Csikszentmihalyi (1988b: 368-9) because the 'challenge to skill' formula appears to be unnecessary. Csikszentmihalyi described this phenomenon as 'splitting' the flow experience, equating it with individuals who do not experience 'happiness' in flow unless the challenge is low. Further he

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[69] Some psychological literature refers to this as 'eustress' - being the outcome of a positive response to stressful challenges - or 'dystress' - being the outcome of a negative response to stressful challenges (Harris 1973).

suggests that this split flow experience provides poor motivation for continuing the related activity. As I will argue, this explanation is inadequate to describe the surfing experience. As an alternative, I suggest that like risk, the challenge-to-skill formula is simply *one* means of achieving that transcendent state of mind in leisure activities. Meditation is an example of a passive route, as this practice usually has the transcendence of self as its objective. And while skill is certainly involved, it is not a skill-to-challenge ratio that determines success, but the ability of the individual to 'let go' of the self. It would be a misinterpretation of the meditation process to explain the transcendent state achieved as the consequence of the practitioner's skill and the challenge to which this skill was put. The skill is necessary but it is not necessary that it be challenged.

From the perspective of flow theory, challenging skill arrives at the transcendent state of mind by using up the individual's psychic capacity in the task at hand and so robbing them of the ability to be self conscious. The experienced risk-taker who finds that they are able to achieve these ecstatic moments of 'oneness' without a challenge to their skills can be understood as exercising a psychological technique or an auto-response learned 'in the heat of battle'. They have learned to invest their psychic energy in the act and to immerse their selves in an environment in which they are familiar. Following Balint's (1959) thesis we could speculate that the repetition of reality testing in risk-taking activities and the resultant reassurances of unity with the outside world eventually leads to the development of a basic trust in this harmony which allows the practitioner to enter this mental state with only 'symbolic' elements of the drama to act as triggers (e.g. *any* wave symbolizing dangerous waves). To draw on a quote used earlier in this chapter: "[Surfers] perceived the wipe-out as death - actual in big waves, symbolic in small ones (Stone 1970: 104)".

The interviewees in this study described the experience more in terms of sensual impressions and oneness with nature, often incorporating a focus on the setting in which the activity is taking place, rather than simply on the act of surfing and the intense psychological states of the risk induced experience. This mellow state of transcendence has more in common with Maslow's 'plateau experience' than his peak experience. Maslow died before finishing his work on the plateau experience, which he claimed was a longer lasting, less intense state where a 'witnessing' quality "...allows

the simultaneous perception of the eternal and the temporal" (Cleary & Shapiro 1995: 8). Simmel (1971b) addressed this phenomenon when he recognized the possibility that life as a whole may be perceived as an adventure without the need for the individual to have ever taken part *in* an adventure. For Simmel (1971b: 192) adventure provides a means of self transcendence, and in order to perceive the whole of life in this way "... one must sense above its totality a higher unity ...".

Maslow experienced this state after a near fatal heart attack and while he came to terms with the inevitability of a fatal one in the near future. His descriptions of the state are consistent with the kind of investment of the self in the moment which those who have come to terms with terminal illness often describe - the serenity and beauty of living for the moment. I suggest that it is this investment of the self in the moment which is the key to achieving flow, whether it be the intense form of peak experience or the more serene form of plateau experience. The combination of risk, skill and challenge offer a rather more action oriented means of achieving this transcendence in more intense, compact moments of peak experience.

This 'mature flow' experience has significant consequences for the surfing habitus. As surfers become increasingly comfortable with larger and more dangerous waves, the availability of surf challenging enough to facilitate flow is reduced. For the most experienced surfers these opportunities might only occur on a few occasions each year. This situation, in combination with other factors which arise for the aging surfer (physical decline, family, career etc.) means that some stop surfing altogether[70]. Increasingly however, older surfers are continuing to surf, finding their thrills in the less intense aesthetic experience of being in the ocean and 'playing' in less challenging waves. In this way surfing also promotes the achievement of flow unattached to risk and challenge because inherent in the normal career trajectory the surfers are provided with increasing opportunities to immerse themselves in the object of their desire on a playful level. This interaction is analogous to Simmel's (1971a) sociability, whereby the individual is transcendent within group interaction which is participated in for its own sake rather than as a means to an end. In

[70] While a decline in ability might seem to provide increased opportunity for flow through challenges to these diminishing skills, this is not necessarily the case since the meaning/value placed on the activity can also be reduced; i.e. the level of performance achievable is not valued as highly. The mature flow approach privileges the interaction with nature over the performance.

surfing this playful interaction occurs between surfer and nature, providing a form of plateau experience.

The renaissance of longboarding has been a prime vehicle for the increase in this form of surfing experience. It is not that longboarding requires less skill or is inherently less dangerous; in fact in large hollow waves it can take even more skill and can be even more dangerous. The critical factor here is that the aesthetic which is part of the longboarding scene does not (currently) entail an inevitable escalation of risk-taking. Broadly speaking, the longboarding aesthetic values a graceful style which can be appreciated in less challenging surf[71].

*Section Summary*

In this section I have discussed an important qualification to the risk oriented nature of surfing culture, and presented an alternative explanation to that of Csikszentmihalyi (1988b). He suggested that flow without a significant challenge to skills was not a 'happy' experience, and this is contrary to the 'mature flow' experienced in surfing. I have suggested that symbolic images associated with the ecstatic transcendence of self - experienced in high(er) risk surfing - may trigger the more mellow and longer lasting mature flow experience, in line with Maslow's (1970) 'plateau experience'. This, without the need for any significant challenge to the individual's surfing skills.

An important factor in this mature flow is the fact that it is a product of surfing's core orientation to risk-taking. The more intense moments of flow experienced through the challenge to skill formula remain a central motivation for surfing for all but the most 'mature' surfer (relative to physical and psychological fitness). The distinction between the two forms of flow is not necessarily always that clear and the fact that an individual experiences one form does not negate their ability to experience the other; in fact the opposite is probably the case.

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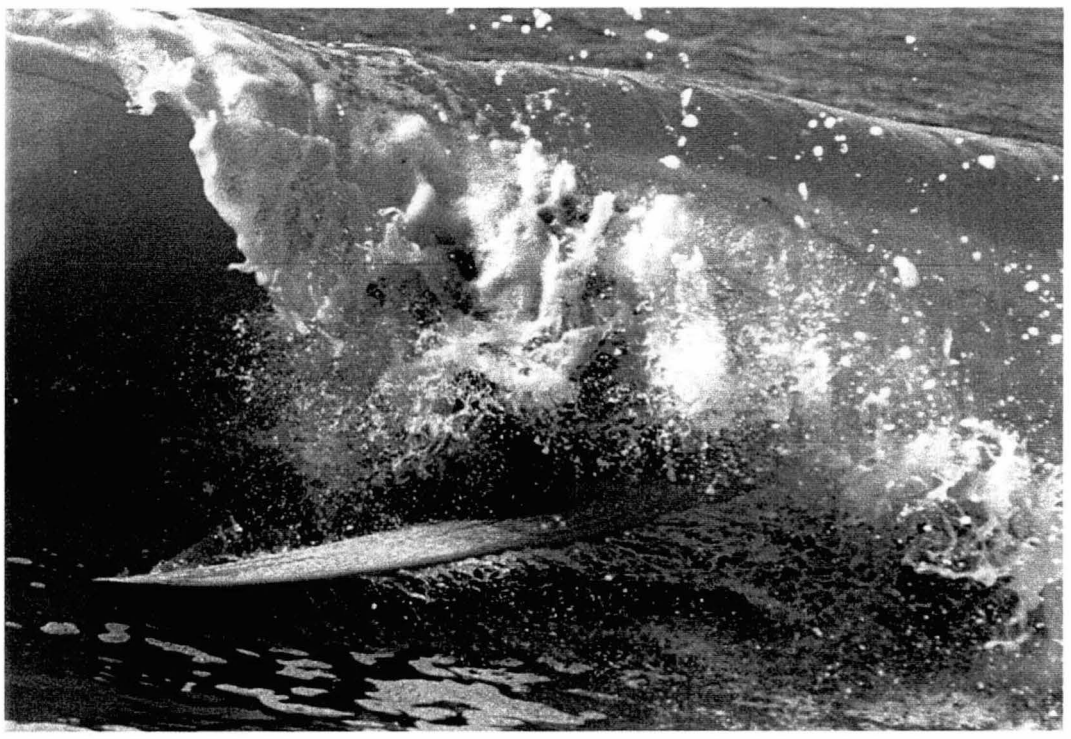
[71] The same phenomenon appears to be true of motorcycling. One of Natalier's (1996) interviewees, an experienced rider, likened the high risk riding of young motorcyclists to youthful beer drinking, comparing it to the acquired taste he said was necessary to appreciate a good brandy; "... kids don't appreciate the elegance of it [motorcycling]. They just like speed" (Natalier 1996: 26).

**Plate 11**

The joy of riding smaller waves on a longboard has more to do with an ability to lose yourself in this graceful aesthetic than challenging skills (*Australian Longboarding*)



A small tube ride like this on a longboard can be symbolic of the awesome power of bigger days (participant observation)

In the sections which follow I examine further the link between the development of a surfing aesthetic and risk-taking in surfing.

## The Surfing Aesthetic & a Postmodern Sublime

Here the dynamic between aesthetic and rational modes is examined further in the context of the surfing aesthetic. The manifestation of the sublime in this aesthetic is discussed and the significance of this development analysed in terms of its consequences for risk-taking.

### *Aestheticization & Risk-taking*

In essence, the postmodern mode of aestheticization involves a privileging of sensual experience and the emotions as against the modern orientation to instrumental rationality. For Featherstone (1992: 267-9) the process entails "...the effacement of boundaries between art and everyday life ..." through an emphasis on taste and sensation in the construction of lifestyles. Aesthetic reflexivity is inherent in this process. The concept recognizes the self as an embodied entity and so this hermeneutic reflexivity is one in which bodily experience is integral, as opposed to the subjective *monitoring* of the body entailed in Beck and Giddens' cognitively reflexive subjects (Beck 1992; Beck et al. 1994; Giddens 1991; Lash & Urry 1994; Lash 1990; 1993). Aesthetic reflexivity has important implications for the self as a reflexive project and the identities with which it aligns.

> Aesthetic or hermeneutic reflexivity is embodied in the background assumptions, in the unarticulated practices in which meaning is routinely created in 'new' communities - in subcultures, in imagined communities and in the 'invented communities' ... (Lash & Urry 1994: 6).

As Creeley (1974: 6) noted, in the early 1970s there was already evidence that people were turning increasingly to symbolic interpretation for their understanding of the world, rather than the demystification inherent in science. In the current postmodern context many commentators see the trend as overwhelming, to the point where "... reality as a whole is coming to count increasingly as an aesthetic construction to us" (Welsch, 1996: 1). Featherstone (1992: 272) claims that, aestheticization, through the culture industry, produces a flow of signs and images, that now saturate everyday life to such a degree they "...defy systematization and

narrativity". In tune with this apparent cacophony of sensory stimulation, postmodern culture involves an aesthetic of *sensation* as opposed to the modern aesthetic of *interpretation.* Following Lyotard, Lash (1991) describes it as a *figural* culture rather than one based on *discourse.* Similarly, Baudrillard (1988a: 186) claims that communication through speech and contact is too slow and is being replaced by the 'look' and ecstatic sensation: "We will seek something faster than communication: the challenge, the duel".

In this aestheticized context the allocation of 'meaning' to risk-taking behaviour is not an intellectual process but affectual; based on desire rather than the ego; images rather than words; what Lash (1993: 10) likens to a 'Kantian intuition' rather than a 'Kantian logic'. The link between risk-taking leisure and aestheticization is well established. Kant (1952: 116) recognized it in the mountaineering exploits of Sassure, and the emergence of alpinism during the romantic period can be seen as a direct consequence of the aesthetic orientation of the day, which encompassed an *appreciation* of the sublime in nature and valued *communion* with nature; an aesthetic reaction of the late 18th and the 19th century to the dehumanizing rationalism of industrialization.

Aesthetic reflexivity, figural regimes, and the aestheticization of everyday life, give primacy to sensual experience; an environment conducive to the development of a significant *meaningfulness* in risk-taking behaviour, rather than the significant 'meanings' which Mitchell (1988) prescribed. This meaningfulness involves a *feeling* that participation in the activity is good in itself. While it is argued that an aesthetic order is gaining a position of privilege, there is no claim here that rationality and the narrative form will disappear. Rationalization of risk-taking behaviour on the grounds of various efficacies is still common enough, especially as participants attempt to justify their indulgences to themselves and others in the face of competing expectations and demands on their time and resources. Surfers can create these rationalizing narratives in order to integrate their surfing life-worlds with their other perhaps less aesthetically oriented life-worlds. However, surfing culture, which grows up around risk-taking activity, reinforces the conviction that it is meaningful, and since 'only surfers know the feeling' negative judgements from outsiders can be dismissed as products of ignorance. The following

exchange between a relative novice and two veteran surfers in Duane's (1996) autobiographic novel *Caught Inside*, depicts the struggle Duane (the novice - a late starter at 29 years of age), has in accepting the morality of the purely aesthetic indulgence:

> A warm breeze drifted off the cliffs as we stood on a platform of shale taking off clammy wetsuits, ... and I had a pang of guilt, though for what, I had no idea. Not moving forward? Losing time? Missing life's train? "We going to get penalized at Heaven's Gate, you think?"
>
> "Nah," Willie said, "God doesn't care about stuff like this."...
>
> I looked anxiously at Vince. He just blew air through his lips as if to say, No Fucking Way. Declaring an unequivocal right to enjoy his chosen life (Duane 1996: 116).

Featherstone (1995) presents an opposing view to mine in his essay contrasting the 'heroic life' with 'everyday life'. He argues that aestheticization is antithetical to a life oriented to risk-taking. For him aestheticization elevates the mundane, routine and taken for granted experiences. Conversely the heroic life, he claims, involves a rejection of the mundane and emphasizes courage, goals, virtue, glory and fame. Risk-taking is an integral part of heroic activity and so it follows that he would reject the thesis put forward here; that risk-taking is facilitated by the current mode of aestheticization.

In this thesis I have claimed an alignment between Simmel's (1971b) 'adventurer' and leisure-time risk-takers; but Featherstone (1995) appears to have ignored the general aesthetic orientation of Simmel's work (see Lash & Urry 1994; Hetherington 1994; Rojek 1995). He argues that the life of the adventurer is an heroic life, and therefore antithetical to postmodern aestheticization. The following discussion of Featherstone's interpretation of Simmel will provide an adequate focus for dealing with his contradictions to my thesis.

When Simmel (1971b: 194) says that the adventurer "... treats the incalculable elements in life in the way we ordinarily treat only what we think by definition calculable", Featherstone claims that this as an indication of supremely rational behaviour, as if the adventurer is a master of rational calculation. But this is surely a misinterpretation, since in the paragraph immediately following Simmel goes on to explain the

point further, describing the adventurer as a fatalist who proceeds optimistically into the mists of unknowing;

> ... just on the hovering chance, on fate ... as if the road will lead us on no matter what. ... The obscurities of fate are no more transparent to him than to others; but he proceeds as if they were (Simmel 1971b: 194).

Further, Featherstone (1995: 59) takes the adventurer's sense of a 'higher unity' and interprets it as a "... capacity to order and unify life...". But the adventurer's sense of unity is not the product of an ordering narrative (interpretation), as Featherstone claims, but an *experience* of unity, of oneness with the whole of life (sensation).

> Surely, it is among adventure's most wonderful and enticing charms that ... the unity which even in a certain sense is life itself - accentuates its disparate elements most sharply, and precisely in this way makes itself the more deeply felt, as if they were only the two aspects of one and the same, mysteriously seamless life (Simmel 1971b: 193).

Simmel (1971b: 188) said that the more adventurous the adventure, the further it was removed from the organized centre of ordinary life, to the point where "... we could appropriately assign to the adventure a subject other than the ego". He was aware of the 'synthesis' of 'fundamental categories' inherent in the adventure experience. The adventurous life made the dedifferentiation of these dichotomies possible, and so provided for the transcendent experience of a unified life.

Featherstone (1995: 64) notes that Simmel saw aestheticization as an antidote for the differentiation and fragmentation of modernity, and he also recognizes that Simmel's approach to modernity "... suggests a persistence of a form of heroic life", but he seems not to make the connection between the two and acknowledge aestheticization as integral to Simmel's 'adventurous life'. The closest he comes to recognizing the possibility of a link between aestheticization and the heroic life is in the final paragraph of the essay where he says that "... new possibilities could have been developing in the twentieth century which present new variations on the heroic life ..." (Featherstone 1995: 69).

Simmel's adventurer is clearly not living the life of a modern rational actor as Featherstone claims, but the aestheticized life with which he contrasts it. Simmel's definitive adventure was an erotic one, and he named

Casanova as the supreme adventurer - not Sherlock Holmes on the trail of Doctor Moriarty.

*Surfing's Postmodern Aesthetic*

While the aestheticization process involves a certain orientation, and at an abstract level, a discernible (non-rational) pattern, particular outcomes are the result of complex social interactions, and as such can be quite unpredictable. At this micro level the process involves what Maffesoli (1991) calls 'formism' whereby a group develops tastes and symbols which distinguish it from others; "A work of art only stirs those for whom it is a sign" (Guyau in Maffesoli 1991:17). In Flynn's semiotic analysis of surfing culture he concludes:

> Surfers as folk culture share a distinctive cultural semiosis that is constituted by a distinctly alternative cultural rhythmicity or temporal order. Surfer's cultural time-sense is composed by a detailed alignment with the moods and temperaments of the ocean, its swells, waves, tides, and other movements (Flynn 1987:412).

This orientation towards nature as a focal point around which to organize one's life is indicative of the particular surfing aesthetic which helps constitute the surfing habitus. The aesthetic pleasure a surfer draws from this relationship with nature involves an appreciation of beauty, from the minute details and changes in colour and form, to the epic grandeur of the sea. The relationship reaches a new level in the creative act, where, as Flynn (1987: 402) points out, the surfer dances *with* the wave in a state of 'anticipatory resoluteness' where "...past, present [and] future are unified". The experience of flow is clearly an integral part of the surfing aesthetic.

But McKibben provides a different perspective on the surfers' relationship with the sea. Through 'profound' human intervention he says that we have socialized nature to the point where it no longer offers "... a sense of permanence or even eternity" (in Giddens 1991: 137). Meteorology is used as an example of this socialization process, but the role that the meteorological forecast plays in surfing culture does not necessarily contribute to a disenchantment of nature. In fact for surfers meteorological forecasts can be a means of an expanded appreciation of nature, as the maps and predictions trigger imaginings and anticipations of distant storms and travelling swells[72]. The following is from an article

[72] An example of this can be seen later in this chapter with my own description of the formation of ocean swells.

in *The New Yorker* which investigates the surfing life of a medical practitioner in San Francisco:

> [Mark] carries a marine-weather radio with him in his van while he is on his rounds. Infrared satellite photographs of the West Coast decorate the walls of his and Jessica's apartment, and two satellite pictures clipped from newspapers, each showing huge North Pacific low-pressure systems that generated memorable swells ... are taped to the door of his study (Finnegan 1992: 41-2).

Giddens (1991: 18) is sympathetic to McKibben's thesis, and for him the institutions of meteorology are examples of the kind of 'abstract systems' which he argues 'disembed' individuals by "...'the lifting out' of social relations from local contexts and their rearticulation across indefinite tracts of time-space". But as I have argued, this same process can also re-embed them on a wider, even global plane. Not by gearing the individual's practices so much to the 'specifics of place' but, in the case of surfers, by orienting them to the fluctuations of the earth's weather patterns, the seasonal changes, the swells and winds and the tidal movements. Even for those who are physically restricted to one general location, this orientation expands the horizons of that location beyond the spatio-temporal in an altogether more fluid and postmodern 'embeddedness'.

This process is perhaps better understood as a dedifferentiation of nature and culture rather than the socialization of nature. The latter connoting a subjugation of nature under a modern rational order, while the former describes the breaking down of boundaries consistent with a recognition of the sublime in nature (McKibben's lost eternal) which aestheticization facilitates in surfing culture. This interpretation recognizes any definition of nature as culturally specific. As Macnaghten and Urry (1998: 1) argue, there is no one nature but a 'diversity of contested natures'; "each such nature is constituted through a variety of socio-cultural processes from which such natures cannot be plausibly separated".

The notion of disembeddedness too appears inappropriate here as surfing culture incorporates the weather and other relevant expert information products as part of its aestheticized habitus. This is an example of how aestheticization provides a mode of adaptation which enables individuals to engage in a meaningful life amidst the pervasive, indeterminate contingencies of a postmodernizing world; where purely cognitive modes

of knowledge are subsumed within the overarching aestheticization. Whether we find the weather forecasters to be agents of colonization or fragmentation, or whether we see them as a source of aestheticization depends to a significant degree upon the aesthetic/rational orientation of the particular habitus from which this judgement is made.

When the products of rational scientific disciplines like meteorology are appropriated as tools of aestheticization - as is the case with surfing - then, according to Baudrillard (1988a: 186-7), we have moved beyond the purely aesthetic into the realm of the ecstatic and the sublime.

*The Emergence of a Postmodern Sublime*

Notions of the romantic sublime and the appreciation of it in nature came to the fore towards the end of the eighteenth century. Appreciation of the sublime in nature involved an ineffable experience of the infinite in the contemplation of terror and beauty in nature, as seen in say the Alps or stormy seas:

> The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature* ... is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on the object which employs it (Burke 1958: 57).

The similarity between the experience of flow and the appreciation of the sublime is clear. In the latter the mind of the observer is so overwhelmed by the object of its gaze that no rationalizing thought can intrude. In surfing it is a total engagement of one's psychic capacities in a physical challenge that facilitates the ecstatic oneness with nature, which both experiences provide.

The appreciation of the sublime in the sea may have experienced something of a hiatus during the era of rational recreation in Australia. At the beginning of the twentieth century the subjugation of nature was introduced to the popular beaches of Australia via the Surf Life Saving Association (SLSA) . While it would be inaccurate to suggest that the rational order which the SLSA enforced made the appreciation of the sublime impossible, by transforming the beach into a swimming pool, as Fiske et al. (1987) have claimed, with its 'flags, lines and whistles', the SLSA may well have inhibited such an appreciation. In any case the

sublime certainly blossomed with the surfing subculture revolt against the SLSA and its modernist repression of ecstatic play (see Chapter 4).

> When you paddle out and see a [10 metre high wave] staring you in the face, its like 'Oh my God' ... Being a surfer and being involved with nature all the time gives you a different understanding of where you might find God (surfer in *Metaphysical* 1997).

The subjugation of nature and the sublime occurred through the rationalist discourse of modernity, and just as the postmodern process of aestheticization frees the individual from rational constraints on the achievement of flow, so too does it open the door to the transcendent experience of the sublime. Prominent in this process is the figural regime which transgresses the "...'limited and positivistic world', the world inscribed by discourse" (Lash 1990: 85). This is consistent with Kant's (1952) claim that the aesthetic object is not graspable by forms of reason; "It is not 'exoterically' available and only made manifest through the development of a different and non-conceptual order of language" (Lash & Urry 1994: 53).

Kant distinguishes between beauty in nature and the sublime; the difference being that natural beauty carries with it a 'purposiveness' in its form, which involves 'limitation'; for example a flower. The sublime on the other hand can also be found in formlessness, so long as it involves or provokes a representation of limitlessness, to which the idea of totality is imposed; for example a stormy sea (Kant 1952; Korner 1955).

The surfer appreciates nature through an aesthetic which also finds purpose in this sublime chaos. The terrible and beautiful nature of a storm is still very much a part of that aesthetic, but as every surfer knows and anticipates (informed by the weather reports), when the storms clear and the winds blow offshore, the confused waves, travelling from far out at sea, will straighten out into more uniform bands of energy - in the form of an ocean swell.

These bands of energy will move *through* the ocean (water is a medium; it does not travel forward itself) until they approach the shore where the shallower depth forces the energy upwards, creating steeper walls of water. The still forward moving energy is slowed at its base by friction with this shallower sea bed and the faster moving pinnacle of the band of

energy pitches ahead of the base, creating a breaking wave. The patterns which these breaking waves form are determined largely by the topography of the sea bed. Given a favourable coastal sea bed topography, the right swell direction and size, and offshore winds to maintain the orderly progress of these lemming like bands of energy, the ideal surfing wave may be formed[73]. "You lose yourself tapping a power that's greater than you, like you're riding that wave of power literally; you become part of it" (Burridge interview 1995).

Clearly evident in the surfer's aesthetic appreciation of the waves is the image of nature as power, which Kant classifies as a 'dynamically sublime' judgement "...caused by an interplay of the imagination and desire" (Korner 1955: 191; see also Kant 1952: 109 - 117). According to Korner, Kant was not content with his distinction between beauty and the sublime, and the category of 'dynamic sublime' was a means of bridging the gap between the more 'sublime' experiences of beauty, and the superior 'mathematical sublime'; "...an interplay of the imagination and cognition" (Korner 1955: 191).

The sublime is not an inherent property of the object, which Kant believes we are more naturally disposed to consider awesome and horrible, but is a subjective appreciation based on ideas:

> Thus the broad ocean agitated by storms cannot be called sublime. Its aspect is horrible, and one must have stored one's mind in advance with a rich stock of ideas, if such an intuition is to raise it to the pitch of a feeling which is itself sublime - sublime because the mind has been incited to abandon sensibility, and employ itself upon ideas involving higher finality (Kant 1952: 92).

The 'ideas' upon which such judgements are based are not to be employed in rational analysis, but provide a source of meaning which enables the actor to intuit the sublime in the object. Kant claims that culture plays a significant role in generating the ideas of 'higher finality' - of the transcendence of self beyond nature. But he qualifies this cultural influence claiming that the foundations of these 'moral feelings' are to be found in human nature and so it is the role of culture to provide access to these innate feelings (Kant 1952: 116).

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[73] Apologies to experts in the field for this clumsy explanation.

If we return to the theories of Freud (1962) and Balint (1959) we find a source for Kant's innate moral feeling in the infant's feelings of 'primal harmony', of oneness with the whole. This is also the case with Huizinga's (1949) concept of *sub specie ludi.* In the surfer we have an individual who recreates that feeling in risk-taking experience[74], and through the surfing culture the thrill experienced has been interpreted in terms of a union with nature from the early days of its renaissance[75]. The appreciation of the sublime is facilitated by the experience of flow and the meanings attributed to it in surfing culture. In the appreciation of the sublime the experience of flow is itself replicated and the meanings attributed to it reinforced[76].

An aesthetic category independent of rationalizations and formalism, the concept of the sublime is consistent with a postmodern aesthetic, and Lyotard (1984) draws on Kant for his notion of a postmodern sublime. The essence of the sublime sentiment which Lyotard adopts from Kant is the intrinsic, strong and equivocal combination of pleasure and pain (Lyotard 1984: 71-82). In surfing, such a combination of emotions is often immanent, and responsible no doubt for the depth of appreciation surfers have of the terrible and the beautiful in a raging sea:

> Big Sunset [Beach] reminded me of the double-sidedness of surfing. ... You are simultaneously propelled by the wave and pursued by it. The best position is the worst; the greatest power is closest to the curl. Apotheosis and annihilation are separated by the narrowest of margins (Martin 1991: 35).

Also, the ecstatic feelings of universal oneness which an appreciation of the sublime can induce are intensely experienced in the transcendence of self immanent in flow. And, as the following description of a wave ride attests, the distinction between an appreciation of the sublime and the experience of flow is not so easily maintained:

> The wave opened its yawning cavern of a mouth. The lip pitched out and loomed over me. I was inside the belly of the beast. For an instant, as if through the lens of an immense telescope, I had a glimpse of heaven and hell, of pleasure and pain (Martin 1991: 204).

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[74] As mentioned, Kant (1952: 116) recognized risk-taking as a source of these feelings in the mountaineering exploits of Sassure.

[75] An example of this can be found in the self-published book titled *The Voice of the Atom* written in the 1930s by a prominent surfer and surfboard design innovator, Tom Blake.

[76] The appreciation of the sublime belongs to the category of 'Cultural Transcendence' mentioned in the previous chapter, and blurs the boundary between the 'Cultural' and 'Foundational Transcendence'. This point is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Simmel (1971b: 193) also implied this link between an appreciation of the sublime and the thrill of risk-taking when he described the adventure as an activity which involved "... complete self-abandonment to the powers and accidents of the world, which can delight us, but in the same breath destroy us".

Similarly, Elias & Dunning (1986) claimed that leisure activities are characterized by the kind of alternation between fear and pleasure which could lead to sublime *experience*:

> [O]ne can say that no satisfaction can be had from leisure occupations without short wisps of fear alternating with pleasurable hopes ... and in some cases, through waves of this kind, working up to a cathartic climax in which all fears and anxieties may resolve themselves temporarily ... ( Elias & Dunning 1986: 106).

For these authors the desire for risk and excitement in leisure stems from the need to escape the routine of modern life. For Baudrillard (1988a) it is the uncertainty of postmodern life for which risky leisure provides catharsis:

> Roger Caillois was perhaps correct in his terminology, and our whole culture is in the process of shifting from games of competition and expression to games of risk and vertigo. Uncertainty, even about fundamentals, drives us to a vertiginous overmultiplication of formal qualities. Hence we move to the form of ecstasy (Baudrillard 1988a: 187).

*Section Summary*

The surfing aesthetic has been shown to entail an appreciation of the sublime which reinforces the experience of flow and the significance attached to that experience. The synthesis between fear and desire, and pleasure and pain, involved in this appreciation has been shown to be a significant factor in the subculture's risk-taking orientation.

The blurring of boundaries entailed in the sublime, and the incorporation of knowledge and information from rationalizing abstract systems within the surfing aesthetic is further evidence of the dialectical postmodern (ecstatic) nature of the surfing habitus, in which synthesis is indicated.

## Representations of the Sublime

In this section I argue that the surfing aesthetic involves a particular manifestation of the sublime in its photography and videos. The nature

of these images and the important role they play in surfing culture is such that they are of primary importance in surfing's risk orientation and the mediation and maintenance of the *conscience collectif* attached to the risk-taking activities.

*The Surfing Media*

To achieve flow the activity must be meaningful for the participant. Initially this may simply be a desire to try something that others have related as a thrilling experience or that looks exciting. As a novice, flow is relatively easy to achieve since a low level of skill is easily challenged and small victories, such as the first time a novice successfully rides a wave, can provide thrilling experiences. These early flow experiences, combined with acculturation processes, motivate continued participation and provide the basis for the appreciation of the sublime in the sea. Both the experience of flow and the sublime then feed on each other with the images of the sublime in surfing videos and magazines mediating this knowledge beyond the localized tribal groupings to facilitate a global *conscience collectif* and the transcendence of individual selves in the broader nation of surfers.

It is a common theme both in the interviews conducted in the course of this study and in published accounts (see Stell, 1992; Versace, 1993; Carroll & Wilcox, 1994), that the images of surfing presented through photography and on video and film have had a considerable influence on people's conversion to a surfing lifestyle;

> Bud Browne's surfing movies, *Big Surf* and *Hawaiian Surf* [circa 1958] showed surfers living in Hawaii purely for the purpose of surfing and pursuing big waves. ... It said that surfing was the nucleus of what you were doing; everything else was peripheral. ... By 1960/61 we were on a boat to Hawaii. ... When we saw the freedom on offer in travel and surf, most of us left the surf [life saving] clubs (Farrelly interview 1995).

And their engagement with a surfing aesthetic:

> We had a book at home called *The Pictorial History of Surfing*, to me an awesome book, kind of like the Bible. I used to pore over it for hours on end before bed and be fascinated by the detail in the photographs ... revealing the interaction between the surfer, the board and the wave (Carroll & Wilcox 1994: 7).

Surfing magazines and videos are the most prominent sources of surfing images[77]. Respondents to the questionnaire bought an average of 9.3 magazines and watched 10.3 *different* videos (an indeterminate number of times) in the past year. Collections of surfing magazines are pored over countless times and favourite images adorn the walls of surfers' bedrooms and beyond. Videos are watched repeatedly, either as whole programs or in fragmented snippets as viewers scan for their favourite sequences or watch short segments as the whim and opportunity coincide. The videos lend themselves to this kind of usage as many have no narration at all and consist solely of surfing sequences choreographed by the video editors to (usually high energy) popular music. These fragmented viewing patterns should not be mistaken for the kind of distracted, background television viewing which McLuhan (1964) described. Usually the viewing involves intense concentration; "The surf film audience typically move their bodies in unison with the surfer on the screen in a state of aesthetic identity" (Flynn, 1987: 411). Contrary to McLuhan's assessment of television, the surfing video - as watched by surfers - is an example of a 'hot' rather than a 'cool' medium.

The surfing media industry boomed during the late 1960s and 1970s, and the magazines and film productions reflected the counter cultural mood of the times (Booth 1994 & 1996). Surfing was interpreted in esoteric terms consistent with the re emergence of an appreciation of the sublime in nature. While the surf movies of the 1950s and early 1960s were happy-go-lucky, 'goofy' sports documentaries of 'surfing safaris' to exotic locations, promoting the possibility of a lifestyle dedicated to surfing, the surf movies of the counter culture era took the aestheticization of surfing to a new level. Embracing more symbolic imagery and music as a means of communication they infused a greater depth of meaning into what many surfers by then considered an art form at least, if not a spiritual experience.

Booth (1996) claims that 'pure' surf films died along with the counter culture. But while the style and to some extent content of the movies have certainly changed - most of them being produced by the larger surfing industry companies featuring their team riders, and sold as videos rather

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[77] Access to images through the internet is expanding at a prodigious rate as well with sites offering free photo images, short video clips, and live footage of popular surfing locations.

than screened in theatres - the surfing aesthetic the counter culture movies portrayed permeated surfing culture at the level of symbolic meanings. And while the spiritual rhetoric of the counter culture is rarely heard these days it lives on in the symbolism and iconography present in contemporary surfing videos and photography; in images of the sublime and the beautiful[78].

Today's surfing video productions rarely stray for more than a few seconds from their depiction of waves and surfing, and when they do it is often in fast motion; the world apart from surfing is portrayed as frantic, comical, and to be dealt with as swiftly as possible, before returning to the aesthetically pleasing world of surfing. The surfing scenes include slow motion images of graceful maneuvers, the play of light on the waves and the spray from the surfer's board, often mixed with aggressive, powerful surfing, athletic and high-risk. Images of the sublime - the mystery, beauty and awesome power of nature – are an integral part of these videos.

The ideal wave is depicted constantly in all surfing media as 'the tube' or 'barrel'. The tube wave is one which pitches out beyond the main body of the wave when it breaks and allows the surfer to ride inside 'in the womb' of the cylindrical shaped wave[79] (see Plate 15). The desirability of these waves has become the central theme in the surfing aesthetic. In order for them to form the waves have to break in shallow water. The hollower they are the more powerful they are and the shallower the bottom on which they break. The best of these often break on rocky reefs because the waves are forced to pitch ahead of themselves as they move more rapidly out of deep water. They are also the most difficult to ride and pose the most risk; often breaking in dangerously shallow water. Through figural representation in the surfing media and through their own bodily experiences, surfers learn to view these waves as both terrible and beautiful, as objects of fear and desire, of pleasure and pain - as images of the sublime.

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[78] The esoteric narrative is beginning to find a voice again in recent video productions like *Metaphysical* and *Litmus*, and in newly released magazines like *Deep* and *Australian Surfing Journal.*

[79] Any semiotic analysis of surfing could not fail to recognize the symbolism here; and it isn't lost on surfers either. While I do not intend to pursue the point, it is worth noting the connection with the regression theses of Balint (1959), and Freud (1962).

The desire to immerse themselves, to become a part of the moment of a dangerous wave is not only the result of the breaking down of boundaries between art and everyday life, but reinforces the breakdown of boundaries between nature and culture as the surfer is lost in interaction with the sea. Through the development of the surfing aesthetic the surfer invests desire in the images of the sublime and the act of surfing sees the satisfaction of that desire; in an intimate and sometimes dangerous dance.

> I remember in one movie Gerry Lopez [was] ... surfing Pipeline ... [with] a backlit effect ... If I saw a tube as I was paddling out, especially if it was backlit, I'd imagine it was Pipeline ... I would really focus on getting myself in the right position and pulling into the tube. It didn't matter whether the wave was going to close out and I'd get stomped and thrashed around, it was really just taking off and getting into that situation just to experience that 'Lopez' moment" (Carroll & Wilcox 1994: 12-13).

***Desire and Images of the Sublime***

Following Kant's (1952) insistence on cultural influence as a prerequisite for an appreciation of the sublime in nature, we should expect representations of the sublime to reflect the culture from which the appreciation emerges. In support of this contention, Wood's (1972: 210) study of the history of the sublime concluded that different forms emerge "... depending on the cultural milieu involved, which fosters its own values and concepts, and symbolizations thereof"; just as Macnaghten & Urry (1998:) concluded with their study of 'contested natures' (see above).

The dedifferentiation which occurs between subject and object - culture and nature - in the experience of flow, provides the basis for a manifestation of the sublime where the image of the terrible and beautiful in nature can include the presence of a cultural element. The typically romantic image of awesome, empty waves is still a common one in the surfing media, but the appreciation of the sublime is also possible when the image of a surfer is portrayed on one of these waves. In fact I would suggest that, for a surfer, the image of someone riding a wave that is awesome to behold can enhance its sublimity. Since, in surfing, the 'ideas' behind the appreciation of the sublime coalesce around a dedifferentiation between the surfer and the wave in the experience of flow, it follows that representations of surfing would stimulate the imagination to a recognition of the sublime most adequately.

The desire which is invested in the media's images of the sublime stems from the memory of the ecstatic experience of union achieved in surfing. These representations work in the manner of erotic images, exciting physical responses in the initiated, as this quote from Greg*, a pioneer surfer who gave up riding surfboards about 20 years ago, illustrates:

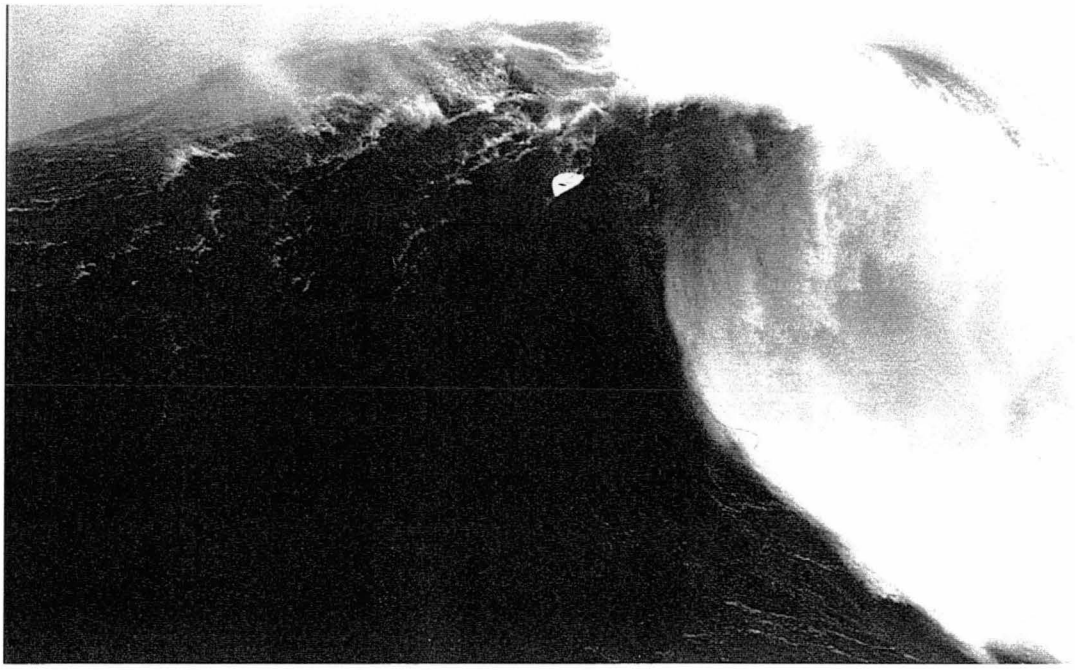
> When I see surfing on TV I feel like I'm still part of it; it's like I never stopped. If I see good waves I get really edgy; it has a physical effect (Greg* interview 1995).

Surfing is often described by surfers as being like sex (as distinct from being a sexual experience). The link between sacred/ecstatic play and sex is well established (e.g. Huizinga 1949: 43; Balint 1959: 64). Creeley (1974: 22) recounts research into ecstatic experience in which 'sexual love' was found to be the second most common 'trigger' for 'transcendent ecstasy' – 'nature' being the most common. Lash (1991: 84-5) points out that sex was linked with the ecstatic experience of the divine in Christian mysticism, and Huizinga (1949: 43) discusses the link between sex, play and ecstatic experience in eastern religion. In the following extract from the *En una noche oscura*, John of the Cross's poetic interpretation of the mystical experience, reveals the liminal space which the ecstatic occupies between the sexual and the spiritual:

> Oh night that was my guide!
> Oh darkness dearer than the morning's pride,
> Oh night that joined the lover
> To the beloved bride
> Transfiguring them each into the other.
>
> Within my flowering breast
> Which only for himself entire I save
> He sank into his rest
> And all my gifts I gave
> Lulled by the airs with which the cedars wave.
>
> Over the ramparts fanned
> While the fresh wind was fluttering his tresses,
> With his serenest hand
> My neck he wounded, and
> Suspended every sense with its caresses (In Creeley 1974: 29).

The allegorical use of sex to explain the surfing experience should be understood in terms of this blurring of boundaries between sex and

**Plate 12**



Central to the surfing aesthetic is the appreciation of the sublime in the terrifying beauty of the oceans waves (*Australia's Surfing Life*)

The appreciation and the experience of the sublime become blurred in the surfing aesthetic. This is fostered by the inclusion of surfers in surfing's images of the sublime (*Australia's Surfing Life*)

spirituality; of the liminal space between the two which the ecstatic union occupies. There are certainly several important similarities between sex and surfing;

i) the sensual nature of both acts;

ii) the ecstatic transcendence and cathartic release which can be achieved in both; and

iii) the similar way the aesthetics attached to both activities act on the individuals' 'faculty of desire'.

One interviewee described the image of a perfect wave as "... like a beautiful woman lifting her skirt" (Nick* 1995). In the same way that the figural representation of the sexually erotic form can serve to subjugate the rational, the super ego to the desires of the Id, the beautiful and the sublime images in surfing's aesthetic operate at the level of desire, which, according to Lash (1991: 174) exists in the postmodern context "...on the very 'surface' of a now largely dedifferentiated psychic apparatus". In this way the surfing aesthetic, through the figural regime and the surfing media, can over-ride or circumvent any rational assessment of risk. This is consistent with Simmel's (1971b: 190) account of his archetypal adventurer Casanova, who, in the rapture of the moment, regularly intended to marry his lovers, but, presumably given some distance and a more rational frame of mind, knew that such a move could only end in disaster.

> I once noticed a very beautiful woman - maybe twenty-five years old, with reddish-brown hair - walk past a group of male surfers. The surfers (I was one of them) were watching a clean, powerful set of waves peel off. I glanced over just in time to catch a wry smile floating across her lips. She smiled, I imagine, in amusement at her anonymity, at the speechless rapture of all us boys ...; gazing at their primary object of desire, they [had] become oblivious to themselves and their companions (Duane 1998: 11).

This desire does not so much 'bracket out' (Giddens, 1991) the awareness of risk involved, as over-ride the concern. The risk, although recognized, only becomes an issue when the 'terrible' aspect of the sublime looms large enough to rupture the synthesis between fear and desire. Through an appreciation of the sublime in nature and the investment of desire in the object of that appreciation, aestheticization has substituted to some degree the bracketing out role which Giddens attributes to modern abstract systems (health, law and order, consumer protection etc.). But at the same time it has provided an avenue for what he calls 'the return of

the repressed' whereby the confronting experiences sequestered by the abstract systems (most notably the inevitability of our own death) return to the realm of individual experience. The experience of surfing can provide many 'fateful moments' where Giddens says the individual is exposed to these existential questions. In fact, as I have pointed out, it is difficult to avoid an awareness of one's own mortality in the unregulated act of surfing.

> At fateful moments it is difficult for the individual to continue to think purely in terms of risk scenarios or to confine assessments of potential courses of action to technical parameters (Giddens 1991: 203).

And so the rational gives way to the aesthetic in a dynamic between fear and desire. But this dynamic is far more complex than a simple tug-o-war.

*The Sublime Derealization of Risk*

The appreciation of the power of nature in Kant's (1952) dynamically sublime judgement involves both a recognition of the fearfulness of the object and a transcendence of that fear:

> ... we may look upon an object as *fearful*, and yet not be afraid *of* it, if, that is, our estimate takes the form of our simply *picturing to ourselves* the case of our wishing to offer some resistance to it, and recognizing that all such resistance would be futile (Kant 1952: 110).

Kant (1952: 110) gives the example of the righteous man who recognizes the fearful nature of God without being afraid of 'him', because this man would not countenance resisting God's will. Similarly, Burke (1958) prescribes a safe distance from the awesome object in order to appreciate its sublime nature:

> ...when danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful (Burke 1958: 40).

But the surfer is like the 'righteous man' who imagines dancing in the palm of the fearful God's hand, escaping before she clenches her fist. It is after all the experience of interaction with the fearful which is at the heart of the surfer's appreciation of the sublime. And as Lash (1991: 175) has pointed out, postmodern subjects are not inclined to maintain a distance from their objects of desire, because the postmodern figural regime "... operates through the spectator's immersion, the relatively unmediated investment of his/her desire in the cultural object". For surfers this

immersion is literally the case, and the distinction between an appreciation of the sublime and the experience of flow is not so easily maintained. In flow, surfers *experience* the sublime in union with the object of their *appreciation* of the sublime.

Welsch (1997) provides an account of this blurring of reality which is consistent with my observations and analysis. He argues that because of our reliance on the media for information, combined with a realization of the way in which media stories can be manipulated, that we tend to see reality more as a simulation; "We no longer take reality quite so seriously, or as being quite so real. And amidst this suspension of reality we judge and act differently too" (Welsch 1997: 86). Further he goes on to claim that this 'derealization of reality' results in a 'revalidation' of the body's 'sovereignty and intransigence' which he says is complementary to the electronic worlds. He claims that "... there are obvious links between the electronic and non-electronic experience" (Welsch 1997: 88) - an observation consistent with the dedifferentiation between the appreciation of the sublime in the surfing media and the experience of the sublime in the act of surfing.

Dedifferentiation has 'derealizing' consequences for risk assessment on two levels:

i) The object of assessment - the ocean's waves - are also the object of an appreciation of the sublime in which fear and desire merge.

ii) The boundaries between the *appreciation* of the sublime and the sublime *experience* are blurred.

Unless the object is so terrifying as to unhinge this sublime synthesis of emotions, the likely outcome from such aesthetic judgements of risk is a sublime appreciation *of* the object and the desire for engagement *with* the object[80]. As one interviewee explained, the image of the sublime draws surfers in; "If the wave is perfect you'll go out no matter how big it is" (Red* interview 1995).

The hyperreal habitat created by surfing's aesthetic neutralizes less terrifying experiences within the dedifferentiated cocoon of the sublime, but somewhere along the continuum of increasing danger the experience

[80] This derealization of risk is quite different to the 'illusion of control' which Lyng (1990) proposed (Chapter 5).

of pain and fear redifferentiate from their sublime union with pleasure and desire, and the aesthetic judgement of risk turns on a sudden reawakening to fear. The following is an extract from fieldnotes taken as part of the 'participant observation' work conducted for this study. They were written late at night while wrestling with the fear and desire of surfing large waves at a break that ranks as both one of the most technically difficult and dangerous, and one of the most perfectly formed waves in Australia. The notes provide an interesting study of an aestheticized risk assessment and the interplay between the rational and aesthetic in the process; what Baudrillard (1988a) might call an ecstatic form of risk assessment.

*16.9.95*

*Two hours from Smalltown; no water; no power; no telephones; desert location; scorpions, dangerous snakes and sharks. The break is on a shallow reef; it breaks fast, very hollow in an off-shore breeze and is very powerful, drilling the surfer into and along the rocky bottom. Cuts and bruises are very common injuries and when it gets big, hospital runs are often needed. [According to the caretaker] the last big swell 15 boards were broken in half in two days and there was one dislocated shoulder.*

...

*19.9.95*

*The surf was eight to ten feet; that's about three times the height of an average grown man - say sixteen to twenty feet by scientific wave measurement standards [peak to trough]. This evening the pounding of the shore break (which is considerably smaller than the waves on the reef) makes the walls of the tent shake. ... Tomorrow the surf should be just as big and I will travel to Big Reefbreak where the surf will be a bit bigger, much hollower and apparently twice as powerful. ...*

*The sound of the big sets breaking on the shore in front of my tent scares me; and there are plenty of reasons why it should. I am not as fit as I should be, I am carrying injuries that are clearly not up to the kind of punishment they could receive and I am not experienced at surfing at this level. I could be seriously injured or even killed. So why even consider it?*

*Prestige - as the caretaker pointed out, Big Reefbreak is about to achieve international recognition through the release of a video made of a contest held*

*there this year. To have surfed a spot like this is worth big points - especially if you can show that it was big through video and photos of the day and maybe even of yourself in action.*

*Conquest - To surf a place like this at its best requires overcoming fear and a test of your ability. Eight to ten foot Big Reefbreak is the most challenging wave I have ever encountered. To back down from the challenge would be a major disappointment.*

*Duty - These conditions are ideal for my 'participant observation' research role. I can test my theories on myself; become the object of my own observations.*

*History - people survive this level of challenge every day. Although top level professionals have recently received a shoulder dislocation and one cut which took 20 external and 12 internal stitches at this break.*

*Aesthetics - I really want to experience the exhilaration and the visual spectacle that comes with being inside a barrel that large and travelling that fast. Above all else I want to dance this dance and I want to do it well. It's not just 'because it's there', these waves may well be the most terrible and beautiful I will ever see; to ride one of them has spiritual connotations.*

*More than anything this last factor is pushing me to overcome the fear and accept the experience on offer. But I don't expect to get much sleep listening and feeling the pounding of the swell and mulling over my responsibility as a father; without doubt the biggest pull in the other direction. I am afraid of the surf but when I was young and single that fear was easily converted into the adrenalin of a challenge readily accepted. Now it seems selfish to risk the prospect of my wife and kids witnessing my foolish death or dealing with any large scale injury (Fieldnotes 1995).*

The following is an example of the relationship between the aesthetic appreciation of the sea and how it provides meanings and context for recognition of the sublime in the image of the awesome wave. It is also a clear example of the dynamic between fear and desire. The extract is from an interview with Tom Carroll, twice world champion, in response to a question regarding one particularly large wave he caught on an island off Sumatra:

> ... the feeling of this fresh, new swell, just so powerful, so strong, coming out of the Roaring Forties, traversing the Indian Ocean and then slanting around those island reefs so pristinely and perfectly. Not a breath of wind except the updraft as the swell jacks up on the reef. You could hear the noise as these things hissed and spat over the reef, and we were kind of shitting ourselves. ... This perfect, big old wave just loomed in front of me. What am I gonna do? Look the other way? I had to take it. ... I've surfed way heavier waves at Pipeline, but it was just the combination of the elements, the isolation and the fear of the unknown that made it such a terrifying, gratifying experience (Jarratt 1998: 72).

But as we have seen, the development of surfing's postmodern sublime stems from a conscious memory of union with the external world and the cultural 'ideas' attached to it. As a result we can expect that the images of surfing which stimulate the recollection of the experience will be varied. Just as it is possible to *experience* the sublime in the form of 'mature flow' in conditions that are neither particularly challenging nor terrifying, so too the *appreciation* of the sublime can extend to images that represent these experiences. For example, a surfer who experiences their greatest moments of flow riding a longboard in small perfectly shaped waves will appreciate images of similar surfing styles and in similar waves as truly sublime (see any longboarding magazine or video). Such a judgement would cut across all Kantian categories *except* the sublime, since the object contains no element of awesome power or fear. This illustrates further the particularly postmodern nature of this incarnation of the sublime which is characterized by dedifferentiations and syntheses beyond that of earlier forms.

***Section Summary***

Representations of the sublime in the surfing media simulate the self transcendence experienced in surfing and act upon the surfers 'faculty of desire' like erotic images, absorbing fear and desire into this ecstatic synthesis. Dedifferentiation between the *appreciation* of the sublime (in gazing at surfing) and the *experience* of the sublime (in the act of surfing) blurs the boundaries between the *imagined* and *reality* - between the experience of the infinite in the *image* and in the *act*; between the *sign* and the *signifier* - and is indicative of a distinctly postmodern hyperreality in which ecstatic risk assessment hinges on whether the terrible nature of the ocean's waves is great enough to rupture the sublime synthesis.

As Rojek (1995: 147) says, in this kind of postmodern space, "... there is no longer any basis for determining the local from the global or real space from fictional or fantasy space". Rojek (1995) argues that under these conditions modernist concepts, like Giddens' (1991) disembeddedness, are inadequate. Certainly in the case of surfing the above processes of dedifferentiation reinforce the anchoring of the self in experience rather than place, and contributes to the creation and maintenance of a global *conscience collectif* which underpins the surfing subculture.

## Aesthetics & Ethics in the Surfing Subculture

Previously I have discussed the ways in which surfers' selves and their identities as members of relatively stable social groups are grounded in experience. While the postmodern project of aestheticization facilitates this, as with Maffesoli's neo-tribes and Rorty's self creation, the surfers and their social formations contradict these theoretical approaches in that they are not the result of a superficial indulgence in group experience, nor indiscriminate interaction with the sign economy. Maffesoli insists that the spectacles which Durkheim saw as important tools for social cohesion in modernity are, in postmodernity, little more than a distraction which " ... evaporates in the diffuseness of postmodern life" (Rojek 1995: 152). But in grounded neo-tribalism the individuals are not (primarily) the spectators but the performers; the creators of the spectacle. Like the circus community, the acting troupe or the football team, the development of a *conscience collectif* which lasts beyond any one performance is inherent in surfing. The signs and images of surfing culture are inextricably linked to the ecstatic experience which anchors surfers in an expanded sense of self in nature and the various layers of the surfing community. In an important sense the highly aestheticized surfing culture is self sustaining: Based on the sublime experienced in surfing, the culture produces signs and images in the surfing media which:

i) simulate and venerate the experience in an appreciation of the sublime;
ii) expand the *conscience collectif* beyond the local to the global;
iii) reinforce meanings; and
iv) stimulate the desire for the experience.

With the quest *for* and eventual satisfaction *of* the desire in the act of surfing, the circle is complete.

Stedman (1997) claims that increased individualism in surfing has resulted in the breakdown of any real surfing community. Unfortunately Stedman's research was restricted to an analysis of the surfing media, which meant that she was unable to investigate the existence of community on the ground as I have done. This methodology also prevented her from establishing the link between the sublime *experience* of surfing and the *appreciation* of the sublime in figural representations in the media. Another problem for Stedman was that she used a modernist framework to analyze what she recognized as a postmodern phenomenon. She found increased individualism with an apparent lack of organic solidarity (the selfish pursuit of thrills does not fit any organic system except that it feeds the industry) and deduced that, given modern differentiation, this was an indication of a decrease in the social[81]. A postmodern alternative, as I have shown, is that increased individualism can result in a affectual solidarity based on shared knowledge of ecstatic experience.

The global surfing aesthetic which has emerged from the surfing's social configurations is an important factor in the integrity of the surfing subculture. It is not simply the product of a broad cultural relativism, whereby, according to Welsch, everything is given equal importance;

> ... [when] everything becomes beautiful, nothing is beautiful anymore; continued excitement leads to indifference; aestheticization breaks into anaestheticization (Welsch 1997: 25).

Contrary to this, the surfing aesthetic distinguishes that which comes within its realm – such as the oceans and their waves - and that which is outside - such as the polo field and its chukkas. The surfing aesthetic involves 'aesthetically fallow areas' and an aesthetic reflexivity which Welsch (1997: 25) claims is necessary in order to avoid the "... turmoil of aestheticization and the pseudo-sensitivity of an Experience Society".

The possibility of anaestheticization is also negated in surfing culture through the prominent position of the sublime – an emotion which transcends the beautiful through a synthesis of the beautiful and the terrible and other like categories; what Baudrillard (1988a: 186-7) refers to as the ecstatic form rather than aesthetic. Baudrillard describes the

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[81] Stedman's paper was based on her honours thesis and therefore limited by necessity.

ecstatic form as immoral because the distinction between the beautiful and the ugly and between true and false are lost. But as I will discuss below, an alternative interpretation sees this dedifferentiation as a stripping away of illusions and a recognition, through cultural/moral relativism, of the aesthetic foundation of knowledge.

The moral and ethical implications of postmodern aestheticization have been the subject of much discussion (e.g. Baudrillard 1988a; Bauman 1992; Featherstone 1992 & 1995; Kumar 1995; MacCannel 1992; Maffesoli 1991 & 1996; Rojek 1995; Welsch 1997 & 1996). The focus of this discussion usually centres around the decline of what Maffesoli (1991: 7) describes as 'universal morality' and the rise of 'moral relativism' - the *ethic of the aesthetic*. According to Maffesoli the ethics which replace morality are more dependent on the groups they structure than the modern universal morality. He sees the link between ethics and aesthetics as a defining feature of postmodernity.

Following Maffesoli, leisure oriented lifestyle groups are sites for the construction of ethics and morality just as they are for other cultural developments. The link Maffesoli makes between ethics, aestheticization, and social groups, does not appear to be in dispute. The picture presented by him (and others) of postmodern society as fragmented and fragile, constituted by transient moments of sociality, leads to the conclusion that the morality and ethical behaviour linked to these social formations is equally unpredictable and unstable.

According to Rojek (1995), Daniel Bell argued that the current hedonism robs society of any moral or transcendental ethic;

> Self-interest overrides concern for collective good. The hedonist gorges on immediate experience and has no interest in co-operating with others to address wider work or leisure needs (Rojek 1995: 116).

Following Bell, surfing can be interpreted as morally reprehensible on a number of fronts; the neglect of work and duty, self indulgence, pleasure seeking, unconstructive (see also Simmel 1991: 96-7). And this is without taking into account the activities which are a part of the cultural trappings; like drug-taking, sexual promiscuity, and public displays of anti social behaviour. Caillois (1961), in his analysis of play and games, concluded that activities which focussed on the pursuit of bodily thrills (vertigo) were an anathema to modern civilized society:

> The pursuit of chance and vertigo ... with rare exception leads to nothing and creates nothing that can be developed or established. It frequently happens that they paralyze, interrupt, or destroy (Caillois 1961: 77).

This condemnation is typical of the mainstream reaction to surfing which emerged in the 1960s (Chapter 4). The struggle over meanings during the transition from the modern surf life saving culture to postmodern hedonistic surfing culture can be seen in the way Midget Farrelly (ex SLSA member; World Champion surfboard rider 1964; and the acceptable face of surfing in Australia during the 1960s) discusses the peak experience of surfing:

> You go into oblivion. ... Nothing matters any longer but you and the board and the wave and this instant in time.
>
> I sometimes wonder whether this feeling's a healthy thing, and it's not really what I'm after in surfing. What I'm after is the conscious, thinking part - that climax that comes through everything you do being perfectly judged and completely right.
>
> But just sometimes this other thing, this feeling of involvement in the waves, comes along too. And, after it's all over, you feel as if you are floating. ... I'm like a drug addict then - everything seems simple, everything seems to fit into place (Farrelly & McGregor 1967: 24).

The ambivalence with which Farrelly discusses the experience is telling; he swings from an attempt to describe the sensations of union with the ocean, to rational analysis in which the experience is devalued, then back to more euphoric description. Farrelly was not a counter culture figure and has in fact been a consistent critic of this period of surfing's history. In my interview with him, and in the surfing and mainstream media, his criticisms are mainly focussed on drug taking and the way surfing was derailed from what he saw as its potential to become a healthy family activity - an acceptable modern leisure pursuit. Farrelly can be seen as an example of the ideal type modern man at odds with the meanings and values of the counter culture and so never fully immersing himself in the sublime surfing aesthetic[82]. Instead the rational justification - pitting skills against a challenge - provided respectability and a mental framework

[82] I am not claiming to know to what extent Farrelly fits this ideal type, only that certain aspects of his public profile suggest it; in fact there are other contradicting images, and the 'real' Midget Farrelly is clearly more complex than the simulated Farrelly I have constructed here.

through which to exercise control over the pursuit of vertigo; as Caillois (1961) prescribed.

Surfing as a leisure activity of the kind Farrelly envisaged follows what Rojek described as the *homo faber* model; a product of the rational recreation campaigns of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries;

> Play, for *homo faber*, is the reward for discipline and effort. ... to be enjoyed only after the pleasures of wealth creation and the duties of social responsibility have been fulfilled (Rojek 1995: 187).

Rojek argues that this model placed our hopes for escape, freedom, and self fulfilment in leisure - but these hopes could never be fully realized. According to Rojek (1995: 188-191) the problem is inherent in the differentiation from other spheres of social life; in particular that of work. Citing Kant and Hegel, he says that the enlightenment concept of labour included leisure and play and that the differentiation of these concepts was the result of the rise to dominance of *homo faber*. The postmodern dedifferentiation of these categories occurs as a result of the democratization of leisure through the mass media, whereby leisure codes get linked to work codes and leisureliness is no longer confined to leisure institutions: "*Homo ludens* is released from the rule of *homo faber*" (Rojek 1995: 188). Following from Huizinga's (1949) argument that play has become buried under the rational order of modernity, and based on the argument that postmodernization strips away the facade of modernity, Rojek claims that through this process we "... recover what the illusions of modernism have concealed" (Rojek 1995: 191).

For Bauman (1992: ix) postmodernity strips the world of the illusions of modernity exposing '*the truth of the truth*'. Recognition of the aesthetic construction of reality (truth) means that we no longer look for 'the real wall behind the painted ones', as Rorty puts it (in Welsch 1996: 15), but recognize that this surface is all there is. The postmodern ethic is one which acknowledges pluralism and the contingency of moral judgements. The problem for the individual is that morality becomes a matter of lifestyle choices.

> The ethical paradox of the postmodern condition is that it restores to agents the fullness of moral choice and responsibility while simultaneously depriving them of the comfort of the universal guidance that modern self-confidence once promised. Ethical tasks of individuals grow while the socially produced resources to fulfil them shrink. Moral responsibility comes together with the loneliness of moral choice (Bauman 1992: xxii).

Welsch (1997) also emphasizes the hyperindividualistic nature of ethical choice in postmodernity: "Morals pass as constructs of near artistic order - but again they are fluctuant rather than of binding validity" (Welsch 1997: 7).

Rojek (1995: 157) claims that with the recognition that truth is contingent, individuals are unable to commit and their only meaningful option is 'constant emotional mobility'. All lifestyle or leisure options seem equally worthwhile and choice is therefore arbitrary.

> Since all leisure choices are defined as matters of circumstance, the individual who becomes totally absorbed in a single leisure pursuit is dismissed as a fanatic. Leisure becomes a hectic move from activity to activity. It is dominated by a consciousness which emphasizes the discontinuity of experience (Rojek 1995: 157).

The kind of leisure which Rojek and others describe as emerging out of this postmodern process is consistent with the narcissistic personality that some analysts warn of (e.g. Bauman 1992, Featherstone 1995; and Giddens 1991) - a constant search for instant gratification;

> ... irresistible eclecticism and the mixing of codes; the pre-eminence of pastiche, gesture and playfulness in social interaction; ... the depthlessness and transparency of activities; the pursuit of seduction as an end in itself; ... Postmodern leisure is, as it were, existence without commitment. It is associated with plenitude but not discretion (Rojek 1995: 7).

For Bauman this postmodern *homo ludens* plays with pleasure and seduction, "... but only in a voyeuristic way which guarantees his or her absolute personal security" (in Rojek 1995: 186). And this aversion to risk is also said to be a characteristic of the narcissistic personality (Rojek 1995: 112). Csikszentmihalyi (1988: 371) declared that narcissists are unable to experience flow because they avoid any activity requiring a challenge to their skills.

While this hedonistic mode described above is a part of the surfing habitus, the end result - the alienated, risk-averse, narcissistic subject - is not an inherent feature of the surfing life world. The key difference is that the surfing lifeworld is based upon a substantial commitment from its core participants, which is the opposite to the fleeting erratic involvement of the above postmodern subjects.

Self indulgence and self centredness are common enough features of the surfing scene, but if narcissism is inherent at all it is in the mode of Maffesoli's (1991) 'narcissistic communities'. These communities are constituted in the *production* of, and in *living* a mythology; rather than a withdrawal into the self. For Maffesoli the narcissistic attention to the body is inherently a process of socialization resulting in "... integration into the collectivity and transcendence of the individual" (Maffesoli 1991: 18). Giddens (1991: 178) also recognized that the indulgence of self construction is at the same time a construction of a social or group identity "... body planning is more of an engagement with the outside world than a defensive withdrawal from it".

Both Welsch (1996 & 1997) and Maffesoli (1991 & 1996) argue that aestheticization has turned the whole of life into a work of art, but Maffesoli focuses on the communal aspect of the artistic life rather than the solitary angst. Maffesoli (1996) (while elsewhere emphasizing the transience of postmodern sociality) also draws attention to aestheticization as a foundation of communal ethics, through warmth, companionship and physical contact: "*...the collective sensibility which issues from the aesthetic form results in an ethical connection*" (Maffesoli 1996: 18). This 'ethical aesthetics' Maffesoli (1996) describes as an 'art of getting along' as opposed to a doctrine of universal rights and wrongs.

The art of getting along must also extend beyond the neo-tribe to relationships between tribes if the aesthetic ethic is to provide any possibility of harmony on a broad scale, as Maffesoli appears to suggest:

> The tribal moment may be compared to a period of gestation: something that is perfected, tested and tried out, before taking flight into the great beyond (Maffesoli 1996: 20).

Featherstone (1995: 51) claims that the aesthetic mode involves the individual in rapid changes between 'heady involvement' and 'detachment', "... which entails varying degrees of mutual respect, restraint and tolerance ...". While Welsch (1997: 70) points to the need to be aware of 'blind spots' (those elements which an aesthetic does not include), he claims that the cultural relativism entailed in aestheticization will result in the acceptance of plurality, and 'recognition and justice' will take the place of 'domination and oppression'.

> Aesthetically reflexive awareness ... perceives deviant principles, sees through imperialisms, is allergic to injustice and encourages one to intervene for the rights of the oppressed (Welsch 1996: 18-9).

As I have shown, surfers come from a wide range of social and economic locations, and they also have a wide range different identities which they coordinate within their everyday lives. For example a surfer might also identify as a teacher, mother, Christian, lesbian, and an environmentalist. All of these identities come with their own sometimes contradictory cultural baggage. But while these surfers can be said to have an intimate exposure to the plurality and difference which Welsch and Featherstone argue will promote tolerance, the surfing lifeworld is itself full of intolerance. These intolerances include conflicts between those who use different surf craft, locals and outsiders, sexism, and homophobia. This is especially the case amongst young surfers where identities are being formed in opposition to others. It is through the symbolic community that tolerance is mediated most effectively, through a sense that 'only a surfer knows the feeling' and through the promotion of this *conscience collectif.*

**Chapter Summary**

The broader aestheticization processes of a postmodernizing society allow for the investment of desire in nature and the pursuit of ecstatic experience through creative interaction with the object of desire. The development of a surfing aesthetic produces symbolic images of the sublime and the beautiful in nature, and attributes value and meaning to the psycho-physical experience of the dance. The surfing aesthetic involves an appreciation of the sublime which simulates the sublime transcendence of self experienced in surfing. Any *appreciation* of the sublime is a sublime *experience* in itself, and so the distinction between the two is blurred. This dedifferentiation between the sign and signifier distorts any rational assessment of risk. Images of the sublime act upon the surfers' 'faculty of desire', and in combination with the derealization of risk, override or circumvent the fear of personal harm.

Notwithstanding the conflicts and intolerance I have found in surfing, the transcendence of self within a community, which itself is based upon the shared experience of an expanded sense of self, is a far cry from the free-floating, fragmented and depthless selves which the postmodern culture

industry threatens to produce. And while the influence of surfing's own culture industry, its expanding bureaucracy and athleticization need to be considered, the surfing lifeworld appears to entail the elements of what Anderson (1996: 215) describes as the 'postmodern enlightenment project'; involving the kind of expanded sense of self I have identified in this study, and locating a 'deeper commonality'.

The rationalism inherent in the postmodern phenomenon of hypercommodification threatens this scenario:

> Play and spectacle may have had their origins in communal life, but they were gradually reabsorbed as privatized, commodified experiences (Rojek 191995: 191).

Every aspect of surfing culture is commodified; the lifestyle is marketed through surfing fashion in the mainstream and used as a marketing tool to sell everything from Coca Cola to Volvos. Its modern origins as an oppositional subculture have been appropriated by the surfing industry as a marketing tool to the surfing population. Even the experience itself has been commodified to some degree through the development of artificial wave pools and the extensive sponsorship of surfers. The level of sponsorship engaged in by the surfing industry extends to almost any surfer with talent, whether they be competitors or not. The surfing aesthetic continues to evolve and in many areas the commercial imperatives of sportization are a factor in this evolution, threatening to suppress the sublime once again under a rational, instrumental order.

In the following two chapters I will discuss the above problems in detail, first through an analysis of the surfing culture industry (Chapter 7), and second in a study of the sportization of surfing (Chapter 8).

# CHAPTER 7
# COMMODIFICATION, REFLEXIVITY & TRUST: THE SURFING CULTURE INDUSTRY

> *It has a lot in its favour: it's new, it's nature-oriented, it's photogenic. But it shouldn't sell out. Surfing has always been open to hype* (Nat Young in *The Economist* 1995: 88).

In the previous chapter I discussed the link between aestheticization, risk-taking, and a postmodern sublime. In doing so I acknowledged the relationship between aestheticization and commodification, in particular in the surfing media. Aestheticization has proven to be fundamental to the nature and perhaps even the very existence of the surfing subculture in Australia. In its postmodern form however, aestheticization operates within, and substantially in concert with, a (hyper)commodified environment. Many commentators argue that current levels of commodification lead to alienation, fragmentation and depthlessness (e.g. Baudrillard 1988; Jameson 1991), while others point to the same process as providing potential for identity construction, liberation and resistance (e.g. Fiske 1989; Clarke 1976). Postmodern approaches are often ambiguous with the potential for liberation and despair recognized (e.g. Bauman 1992; Kellner 1992).

In this chapter I examine the surfing culture industry in order to establish its role and its impact upon the nature of the surfing subculture and its social configurations. First I discuss the historical context in which this distinctive industry developed. I then examine the three-way relationship between the surfing culture industry, the broader surfing subculture, and the parent culture, through a study of the three dominant surfing industry companies in Australia.

The analysis addresses the importance of bodily practice and experience in the surfers' sense of self, their identity as surfers, and the constitution and resilience of the subculture and its social forms. It asks whether the surfing culture industry alienates surfing culture from its ecstatic foundational experience; i.e. whether the commodified sign loses its connection with the signified? A reflexivity inherent in the subculture is found to facilitate a level of 'active trust' (Giddens 1994) between industry

and the broader surfing population. At the time of writing this trust appears to be maintaining the connection between the industry (base) and its subcultural roots (substructure). This is the case despite being threatened by the imperatives of economic growth within the industry, exacerbated by its connections with the mainstream sportization of surfing. The *potential* for ruptures in the boundaries between the subculture and its parent culture are inherent in any loss of trust between the subculture and its industry which may emerge out of interactions at the economic interface between the surfing culture industry and the parent culture.

## The Surfing Culture Industry[83]: An Overview

The surfing culture industry has a number of sectors; surfing tourism, media, surfing schools, professional surfing, clothing and fashion accessories, wetsuits, surfboard manufacturing, and other surfing related accessories. In this section I provide a brief overview of the industry's development, before concentrating on the 'Big 3' Australian companies in the industry - *Quiksilver*, *Billabong*, and *Rip Curl* - in the following sections.

In spite of the conflict surfers had with the established authority on the beaches (the SLSA and Local Councils), the mainstream media initially embraced the new surfing culture. This is perhaps not surprising, given the dynamics between pleasure and discipline at play in the wider community in the early 1960s, and trends towards individual expression and self discovery.

> All the mass media and channels of publicity have thrown their weight behind the surfies: the Sunday newspapers carry surfing supplements, disc jockeys plug surf music remorselessly, the advertising agencies flatter and glamorize the beach life. They know what the coming thing is (McGregor 1967:285).

The mainstream culture industry enthusiastically appropriated a sanitized version of surfing culture. Records were released by popular figures like

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[83] The surfing culture industry refers to the industry which operates from within the subculture and excludes the production of surfing culture products by mainstream companies for consumption in the mainstream market. All the industry figures quoted in this chapter should be taken as a guide only. The companies involved don't provide them (except in a promotional context) and I have used a range of sources, including mainstream newspapers and magazines, radio interviews, and estimates from *Surfing Australia Inc.* All currency figures provided are in $AUS unless indicated otherwise.

Sir Robert Helpmann with *Surfer Doll* and *Surf Dance*, Barry Crocker with *I Can't Do The Stomp* and Little Patti's *My Blonde Headed Stompy Wompie Real Gone Surfer Boy*. The surf dance called the stomp was 'all the rage' with 45,000 competing in the national stomping championships in 1962 (Young & McGregor 1983: 92). Hollywood 'beach blanket' movies and television programs, like *Gidget* - which was adapted from the 1959 movie to a television series - were popular mainstream fare. And the Australian Broadcasting Commission produced *The Midget Farrelly Surf Show* in 1967.

But while surfing culture was being appropriated for popular consumption the subculture was developing independently in a more subversive direction through its own magazines, its own movies and an affinity with the co-emergent counter culture movement. The elements of 'conspicuous display' (Irwin 1973) in the Californian scene became a part of the booming scene in Australia as well, with vandalism, wild parties and general 'antisocial' behaviour becoming distinguishing features of the new surfing subculture.

The contradictions between the mainstream version and the more subversive reality soon became apparent and surfing temporarily lost its marketability within the parent culture. During this period entrepreneurs from within surfing's ranks began supplying (and creating) a demand for surfing accessories and a unique style of clothing.

Clarke et al. (1976) tell us that the counter culture lifestyles of the 1960s and 1970s were a raging commercial success:

> The counter culture explored, in its small scale artisan and vanguard capitalist forms of production and distribution, shifts in taste which the mass consumption chain-stores were too cumbersome, inflexible and over-capitalized to exploit ... [W]hen the trends settled down, the big commercial battalions moved in and mopped up (Clarke et al. 1976: 66).

But as Booth (1996: 24) claims, this has not been the case with the surfing culture industry, "...where small, flexible, innovative and trend setting manufacturers still produce nearly all equipment and accessories, clothing, magazines and films". He argues that instead of leading to 'big capitalism' the surfing culture industry evolved into a 'distinctively post-Fordist form' (see also Humphreys 1996). But while many companies within the industry could be described as small scale and flexible, only

surfboard manufacturing retains its artisan form[84], and it is the large scale companies which have proven to be most significant in the subculture's resistance to mainstream subsumption.

As a consequence of post-Fordist modes of operation, combined with the temporary withdrawal of the mainstream culture industry from engagement with the surfing subculture, the surfing culture industry expanded from *within* the subculture in a manner which typifies what Lash (1990:197) described as the cultural colonization of the commodity. According to *Surfing Australia Inc.*, (1996: 4) in 1992 the industry in Australia had an estimated yearly turn-over in excess of $806 million and employed over 7000 people, and indications are that the industry had continued to grow in the years since. Gordon Merchant, co-owner of *Billabong*, claims that the increase in growth in his company has been between 15% and 25% per year for the ten years between '87 and '97 (Collins 1997: 73). In 1998 the industry world wide was estimated to be worth around $US4.5 billion annually, with the Big 3 ranked amongst the top five surfing industry companies internationally (Goatley 1998: 71-9).

In typical post-industrial fashion, the wetsuits and most other products the large companies produce, which include clothing, watches, bags, and various accessories emblazoned with the brand names and logos, are made off shore in developing countries. Their Australian bases concentrate on product development, design, distribution, marketing and promotional activities.

## The Big 3 & the Surfing Culture Industry

The surfing culture industry in Australia is dominated by three large companies - *Quiksilver*, *Billabong* and *Rip Curl*[85]. They have many critics

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[84] *Surfing Australia Inc.* estimated that in 1992 there were around 600 surfboard production facilities with 75% of these employing less than five people (50% were one to two person operations), producing approximately 80,000 surfboards for the domestic market and 5,000 for the export market each year (including those produced by 'backyarders') (Brooks & Atkins 1993: 25). Growth in this sector in the intervening years is unlikely to have matched that of the clothing and accessories sector. The latter sector's growth is largely due to the development of overseas and mainstream (non-surfer) markets (Goatley 1998).

[85] By discussing these companies as part of a group, I may give the impression that the Big 3 form some kind of cartel. The fact is that while they are separate and competitive companies, their strategies in regards to the areas of interest here are so similar as to negate the need for individual attention. To what extent this is coincidence, a case of following the leader, or collusion, I cannot say.

within the subculture, and their dominance of the surfing culture industry is not always 'healthy' in a free market sense. However, I argue that their position *within* the subculture, in combination with their broad commercial success, has made them bulwarks of resistance to subsumption within the parent culture. I argue that this has occurred through the very process of hypercommodification, which;

i) creates symbolic boundaries between surfers and non-surfers; and
ii) markets these symbols to the mainstream consumers, reinforcing the differentiation, while allowing the consumption of a *taste* of the surfing aesthetic.

The crucial factor in this hypercommodification is that it has occurred without alienating the culture from core surfers, and to a significant extent, supplying surfers with products that they accept as genuine 'insider' products.

*Dominance*

The Big 3 all came from within the surfing subculture in the late 1960s and early 1970s; surfers supplying commodities that the mainstream failed to deliver and playing a significant role in the development and marketing of 'surf fashion'. While all three produce functional items for the surfing community, such as wetsuits purpose built for surfing, a significant portion of their income (if not most) comes from the sale of surf fashion and accessories sold to non-surfers. With strategies for maintaining and capitalizing on their surfing connections, they have been able to ward off infiltration of the subculture market from 'outside' mainstream companies and dominate the mainstream market for surf culture products.

*Rip Curl* began in 1969 in the Victorian town of Torquay when Doug Warbrick and Brian Singer started making surfboards for the local market. In 1970 they began making wetsuits designed for surfing, something that no other company was doing in Australia at the time, and by 1973 they were the market leader in Australian sales. They now also produce clothing and accessories, and have corporate Licensees in the USA, France, South Africa, Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Japan (Jarratt 1998: 76; Hynd et al. 1994). They supply over a third of the world market for surfing wetsuits with an annual turnover estimated at over $150 million (Goatley 1998: 79; Jarratt 1998: 76).

*Quiksilver* also had its beginnings in Torquay in 1973 when Alan Green left *Rip Curl* to concentrate on clothing in partnership with another surfer, John Law. *Quiksilver* now also make wetsuits and fashion accessories, and have Licensees in Europe, Japan, Brazil, USA, Canada, South Africa, Chile, Indonesia, Mexico, Turkey and South Korea. *Quiksilver* is reported to be the world's largest surfwear company with an annual turnover of between $US300-900 million (estimates vary), without taking into account Australian figures (Goatley 1998: 73; Jarratt 1998a: 76).

*Billabong* started on Queensland's Gold Coast in 1973 when a surfboard shaper, Gordon Merchant, formed a business partnership with his wife and started making boardshorts. The company now also produces fashion accessories and wetsuits. *Billabong* is said to be the most successful label in Australia with an annual turnover of around $100 million with a further $US70 million in the United States (Goatley 1998: 75).

I have mentioned the founding partners of these companies because they were, and according to their publicity, remain surfers, and because at the time of writing they all retain a controlling interest in these companies (Goatley 1998). This will prove to be a significant point in the analysis of the surfing culture industry in regards to its insider status and reflexive relationship with the broader subculture.

The status of the Big 3 internationally - all rated in the top 5 (Goatley 1998) - is significant as an indication of their overwhelming dominance nationally. Their presence is felt in all areas of the surfing industry and culture in Australia, and as indicated above, their influence is not always considered a positive one. Retailers can't afford not to stock their products since the mainstream public come to the surf shops to buy the big name labels. As one surf shop owner confided, he only stocks surfboards and wetsuits for the image; "... the real money is in the clothing" (Fieldnotes 1995). An editor of one of the surfing magazines said that smaller retailers complained of being bullied into stocking whatever products the companies dictate, or risk losing their account (Bill* interview 1995). One small manufacturer complained that he was constantly slipping down the list of creditors because the retailers had to pay the Big 3 on time or they would lose their account (Fieldnotes 1995),

something an industry insider said was a widespread problem (Reg* interview 1995).

When mainstream interest in the culture re-awakened with the professionalization of the sport (see Chapter 8), many surf culture manufacturers took the opportunity to break into the mainstream market, selling the surfer style through popular chain stores like *Myer* and *Grace Brothers*. While this was a significant moment in the incorporation of surfing culture into the parent culture, it was a fairly short term affair. The Big 3 soon withdrew from mainstream stores in order to avoid losing credibility within the subculture (a fate which had been the undoing of some prominent US brands) (Austen and Bill* interviews 1995; see also Baker 1999; Goatley 1998; and Doyle 1994).

Mainstream manufacturers soon appropriated the surfing style and began producing it under their own labels; or alternatively by purchasing existing surfwear companies. Also, many, if not most surf shops, once cult enclaves intimidating to the outside world, began to change their focus from the surfer to the more lucrative mainstream market for authentic surf culture brands. As an executive from one of the Big 3 stated, the surf shops function as "... virtually our own chain of stores to sell from" (Eric* interview 1995).

Magazines rely on their advertising to such an extent that when *Quiksilver* was convicted for false labeling - having declared that their wetsuits were made in Australia when in fact they were made in China - there was no mention of it in any of the surfing media. The editor of one of the top magazines at the time said that the company had 'strenuously' put it to him that there was nothing to be gained by publicizing the case, and while there had been no threat of withdrawing advertising he didn't want to let it get to that stage and agreed with their request. "We walk a fine line between trying to maintain our independence and not upsetting these companies" (Baker interview 1996). Another editor told the same story; "I get dictated to by the big companies as to what I can write editorially. I'd love to do an expose on them but I daren't" (Bill* interview 1995).

The film and video industry is also dominated by the Big 3 with their sophisticated promotional productions.

> The surfing industry identified videos as a cheap and easy way to advertise their products ... [They] quickly cornered the market and squeezed out independent producers ... [with] few exceptions (Booth 1996: 19).

Some independent producers remain in the industry by advertising a range of products in their videos. And the development of reasonably cheap video technology provides the opportunity for amateur productions which can prove popular on a local (tribal) scale.

Maurice Cole (one of the most successful surfboard manufacturers) claims that even the biggest surfboard companies are affected by the dominance of the Big 3:

> We make boards for [pro] surfers, pay them to ride our boards and then clothing companies won't even let us put our stickers on the board (Maurice Cole in *Waves* 1998: 66).

They provide up to around 60 surfboards per year, per surfer, to their top sponsored riders, who are inevitably also sponsored by one of the Big 3. These companies often dictate whether the surfboard manufacturer can have their logo on their surfboards and if so what size and where it can be located. It doesn't matter that the surfboard manufacturer might be providing the bulk of the financial commitment to the surfer (this often occurs with 'up-and-coming' surfers), they are unlikely to resist any condition of this kind and risk losing the opportunity for a lucrative contract in the future with one of the Big 3 (Bill* interview 1995; Baker interview 1997).

The main point here is that the influence the Big 3 have over the surfing culture industry is pervasive and formidable. In what follows I will discuss the extent of this influence as it translates across the subculture through the companies' construction and maintenance of cultural boundaries between the surfing subculture and the mainstream.

*Cultural Boundaries*

The Big 3 promote the distinction between the subculture and its parent culture. The symbolic boundaries they create serve to keep mainstream leisure companies out of the subculture market, and provide the surfing culture industry with access to the mainstream market via an image of authenticity. In the process the Big 3 dominate the hypercommodified symbolic community mediated through surfing magazines and videos. The Big 3 all endeavour to maintain their links with the surfing subculture

through their deference to the surfing experience and the myth of the untrammeled surfing life. They do this through their marketing and myth making and by incorporating it into their corporate cultures - and their corporate image:

> [L]eading players in the trade still live and operate from the small-town surfing meccas in which they started. They employ devotees of the sport on a flexi-time basis so that, from CEO to floor sweeper, they're free to slam the office door and bolt for the beach ... It's this policy of "maintaining the rage" ... that has been fundamental in keeping the faith with core customers (Goatley 1998:72).

> It's not a policy to employ only surfers, but it is felt that there is an advantage to do so because it keeps us in touch with our market. ... When I was hired I was told by the executive director that he expected to see me in the surf when it was good and not in the office. It's not a hard and fast rule but it is a strong policy (Eric* interview 1995).

This approach is evident in the way *Rip Curl* conduct their annual meetings. They are held aboard a boat cruising the Indian Ocean, stopping at remote island surf locations:

> On those trips, we make sure we take along people in their mid-20s who are already in the management structure but are still progressive surfers so they are completely immersed in the surfing lifestyle ... They put us back on track if we older guys start losing the plot (Warbrick in Pawle 1996: 13).

While this corporate culture is clearly used as part of the company's promotional myth making (similarly with *Quiksilver* and *Billabong*), it also serves to embed the companies within the subculture's foundational, cultural, and social transcendence. As Thrift (1999) observes of the industry which has grown up around walking as a leisure activity;

> ... the power of the meanings circulated by this industry is founded in the intensification of present experience coded in the body practices ... The background has allowed this foreground of symbolic delegates to develop (Thrift 1999: 10).

Stemming from this 'background', the 'affectual' solidarity that underpins surfing's social forms is also present within the surfing culture industry in general; as this comment from Butch Barr, ex *Rip Curl* executive and currently Australian licensee for *Reef Brazil* (a successful international surfwear brand) illustrates:

> One thing that money hasn't done here is change the class structure of Torquay. If you go down the pub, you'll see Greeny [Allan Green - *Quiksilver*] having a beer with the plumber, or Brian [Warbrick - *Rip Curl*] having one with the gardener, who probably used to be the dope dealer ten years ago. ... We're like family (in Jarratt 1998: 76).

In light of the industry's inherently subcultural character - and especially its connection with surfing's foundational transcendence - we can represent it in the shape of an inverse pyramid (Fig. N) which rests upon the subjective experience of surfing.

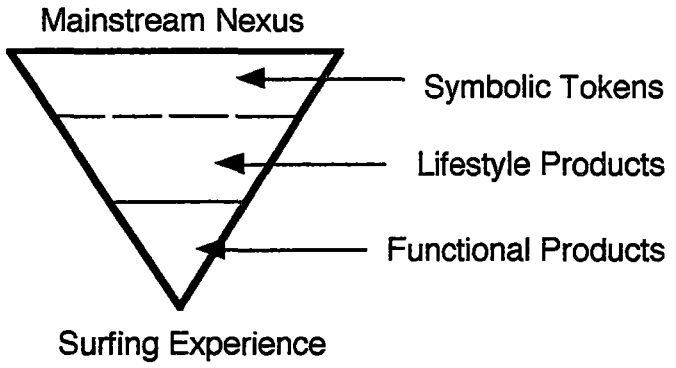


**Figure N:** The surfing culture industry as configured by the Big 3.

The first level supplies functional commodities to surfers, such as surfboards, wetsuits, wax, legropes and a few other minor and non-essential accessories. The next level up - one step removed from the experience - supplies surfers with lifestyle commodities such as magazines, videos, travel packages and the clothing and accessories which provide the tokens of identification, and the means for communication with other surfers beyond the local community. These signs are also marketed in the final level where the surfing image is sold to the mainstream as surf fashion. By providing the surfing community with functional products directly linked to the act of surfing (Level 1) the Big 3 establish their credentials as 'insiders' from the point of view of the 'outsiders' - the mainstream consumers.

> Symbolic tokens are actively sought and adopted if their relevance is vouched for by the trusted authority of the expert, or by their previous or concurrent appropriation by a great number of other agents (Bauman 1992: 195).

This image of authenticity is further enhanced because the companies don't sell their products in overtly mainstream stores, but require outsiders to 'cross over' into surf shops (often simulated versions) to purchase their labels from within (simulated) subcultural space as a

tourist might buy a genuine souvenir in an 'authentic' native village (see MacCannel 1992).

> Many of the industry heads have made a decision not to market in the mainstream shops and not to advertise in the mainstream media (Eric* interview 1995; see also Goatley 1998: 72).

These simulated surf shops, or 'surf boutiques' target the mainstream market and are decorated with the symbols of the surfing subculture. They display surfboards that they rarely sell, screen surfing videos and stock magazines, but their target market is not the established surfers, it is the surfing neophytes and other identity shoppers. These outlets can be found in malls, and shopping centres all over the country[86]. The mainstream consumer can purchase a T-shirt which declares 'Only a Surfer Knows the Feeling' - literally or symbolically - and in doing so help in the maintenance of difference which made the product desirable in the first place. They are not necessarily pseudo-surfers but postmodern consumers of style experiencing to some degree the surfing aesthetic; an aesthetic in opposition to the modern rational order.

> The aesthetic aura is then the consumer's primary acquisition, with the article merely coming alongside. ... aesthetics altogether is not just the vehicle, but rather the essence (Welsch 1996: 3-4).

In this way the commodification of the surfing aesthetic markets the *existence* of the secret (the 'feeling' that only surfers know). A secret which unites those who know (Maffesoli 1996: 90-1), and 'entertains' those who don't.

The corporate image fostered by the Big 3 helps ensure their dominant position within the mainstream market for surfing culture, and promotes their insider status within the subculture. This is enhanced further in three ways:

i) The Big 3 sponsor large numbers of promising young surfers around the country so that those within the culture with status are seen to wear their brands. This works both through young surfers identifying with their heroes, and through the sponsored surfers and their cohorts coming to see the companies as benevolent institutions within the surfing subculture.

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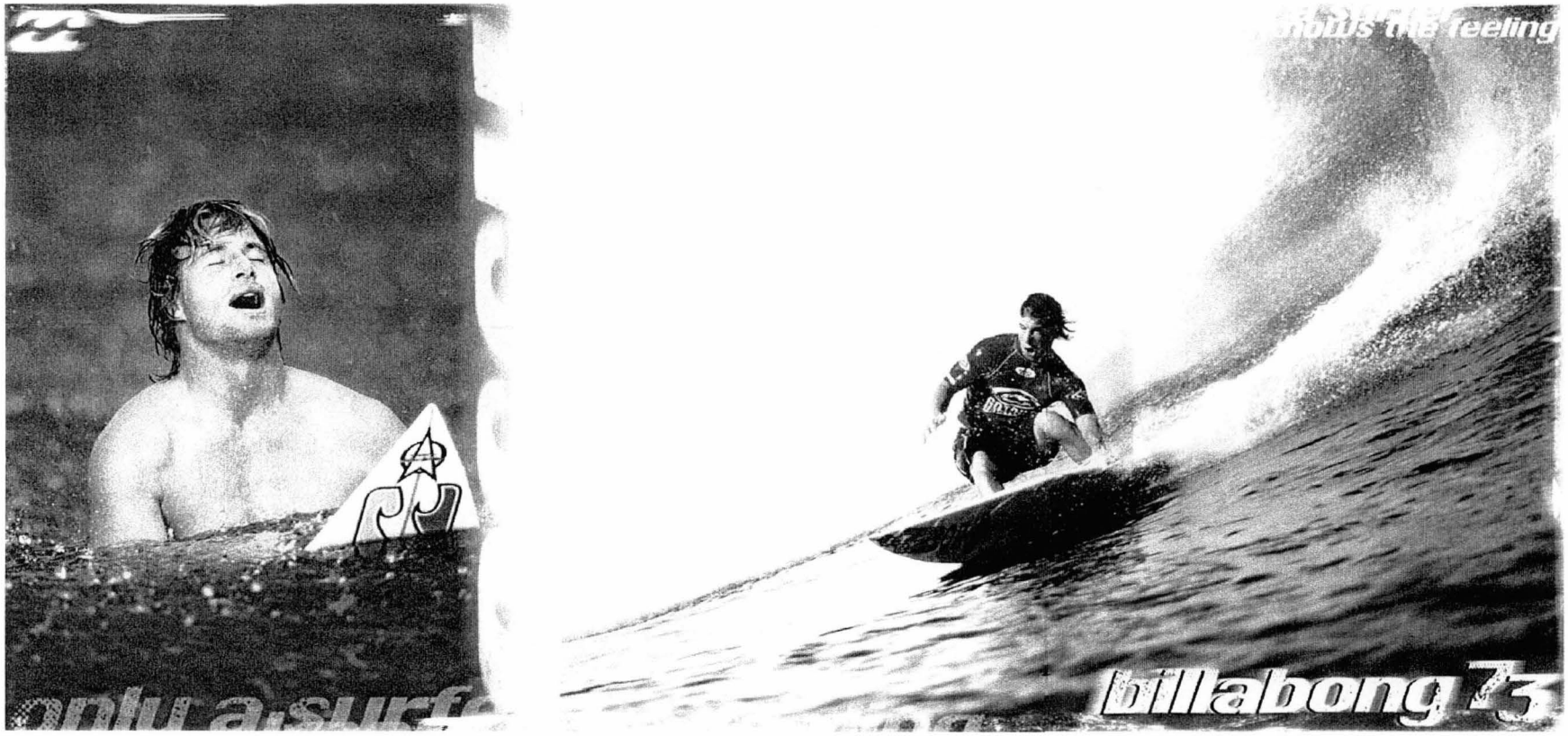
[86] Surfers do shop in these boutiques for the same symbolic tokens and a few functional items, like wax, legropes and perhaps wetsuits if the range is adequate and the shop convenient. But surfboards are usually purchased from the local factory or 'hardcore' surf shops which target surfers as a significant part of their market, and for the authenticity the presence of 'real' surfers in their shops provides.

**Plate 13**




' Only a surfer knows the feeling' (*Australia's Surfing Life*)

ii) They produce high quality videos, magazine articles, promotional literature and advertising, in which they promote themselves, through myth and image making, as an integral part of the subculture. The videos are based on mythical surfing themes and use high quality, innovative photography and editing. They regularly feature exotic locations with their high profile sponsored surfers using their equipment, wearing their clothing, and riding surfboards with their logos. Using the same formula, the companies send top freelance photographers on surfing trips to exotic locations along with their sponsored surfers. The result is articles and photographs featuring the company's logo and of a standard that no magazine could refuse. Taking into account their domination of paid advertising space in the magazines, the profiles of the Big 3 within the media are large indeed. Kelly Slater, *Quiksilver's* top rider, believes the Big 3's influence on the culture is 'incredible':

> They basically produce what people are going to see ... what the image of the whole aspect of surfing is: the whole lifestyle, the whole sport, everything like that, that's all directed by what surf manufacturers want really (Slater in Brown 1997: 6).

iii) They back both sides of the long-standing conflict within the subculture between those who see surfing as a sport and those who see it as an art form.

> The dichotomy between soul surfing and competitive surfing really does exist ... The existence of the two elements of Rip Curl's promotions [competitive and soul surfing] is recognition of the dichotomy (Eric* interview 1995).

They do this by promoting some of the major surfing competitions in the country and sponsor all the top competitive surfers. At the same time they sponsor other top surfers as 'soul surfers' and promote them as free spirits who live the mythical surfing life, travelling to exotic locations and surfing in their videos and featuring in their magazine promotions.

As I have demonstrated, the Big 3 emphasize their roots in surfing in their myths of origin, as part of their promotional and marketing strategies. They maintain their links with the culture in a variety of ways, including the incorporation of the surfing aesthetic within the corporate culture. In doing so they have set a benchmark for others wishing to supply the surfing market with its specific cultural goods. Other companies must

compete against the impeccable 'insider' pedigrees of the Big 3 in a culture whose myths embed surfing in opposition to the mainstream.

The Big 3 have become a dominant force in the creation and maintenance of surfing culture, and the subculture has become dependent upon them for their products, both in the realm of consumable goods and for the construction and maintenance of the subculture's symbolic boundaries. But the success these companies have had in differentiating the subculture from the mainstream has also put them in a position where their continued success within the surfing market (and consequently the mainstream market) depends upon the maintenance of their connection with the subculture, both symbolically and by engaging in the lived experience of the subculture. This engagement must be seen to be in good faith; surfers have abandoned top selling labels in the past because of a perception that they have crossed over and operated from outside - from within the mainstream (Austen interview 1995; Reg* interview 1995).

> Hang Ten started out selling their clothing in the surf shops until they'd established an identity in the surf community; then they expanded to bigger clothing stores and, finally, to major retailers ... as soon as Hang Ten become [sic] popular with non-surfers, surfers stopped wearing their trunks (Doyle 1994: 132).

*Reflexivity & the Surfing Culture Industry*

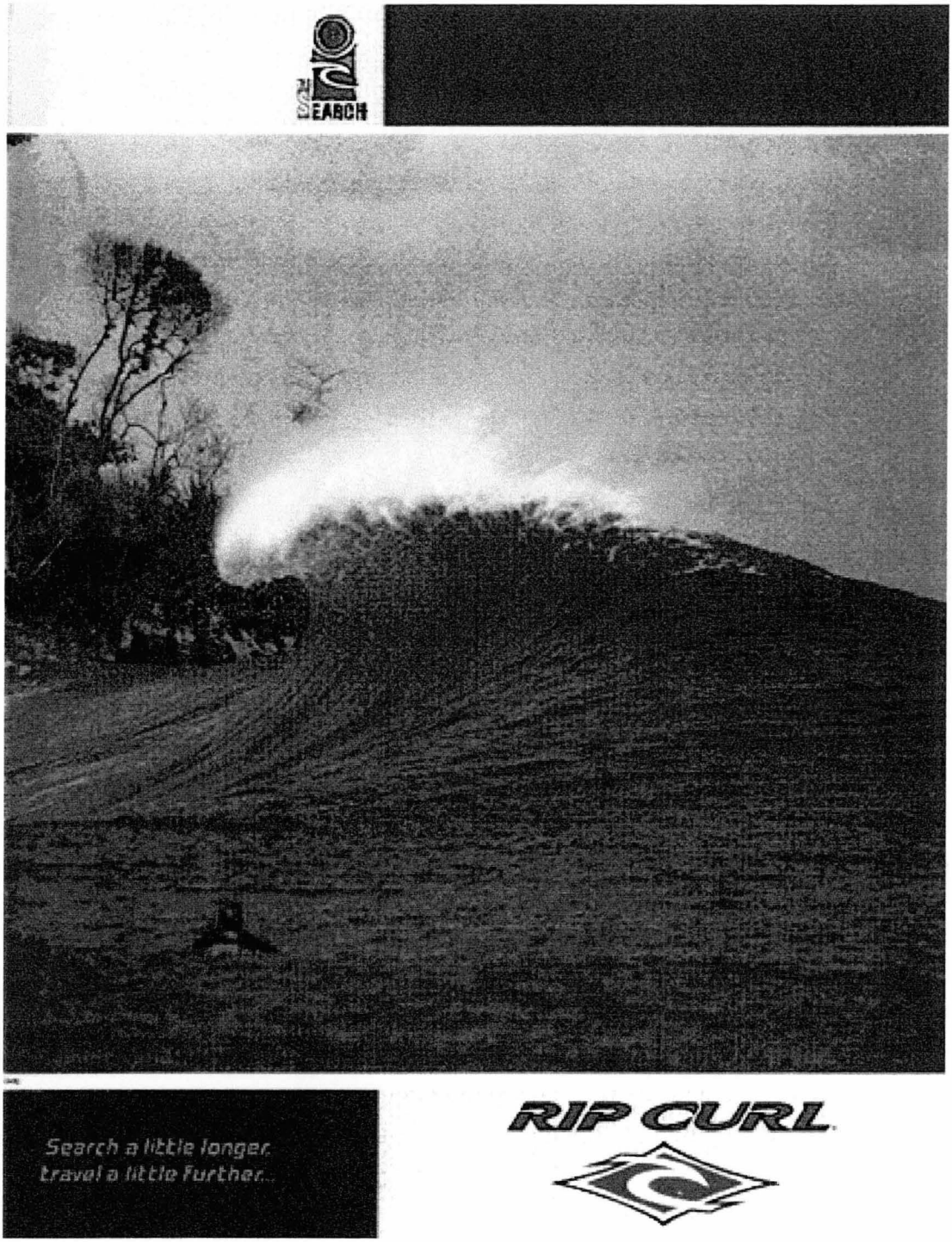
According to Bernstein (1991: 9), Adorno saw the culture industry as "...the societal realization of the defeat of reflection; it is the realization of subsumptive reason, the unification of the many under the one". And while recognizing that creative interpretation occurs on both the individual and collective levels, Giddens also laments that to varying degrees;

> ... the project of the self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life ... a substitute for the genuine development of self (Giddens 1991: 198).

However, as indicated above, this study did not reveal a lack of reflexivity in the way that surfers approached the consumption of their cultural commodities. As one editor of a surfing magazine explained;

> Most surfers aren't fooled; most still spend their money on boards and travel, not 'the look'. The industry target is the grommets [neophytes] and the 'western suburbs' [inland based surfers or pseudo surfers] (Bill* interview 1995).

**Plate 14**




Rip Curl's 'Search' promotion exploits and promotes the appreciation of the sublime, and the quest for sublime experience (*Waves*)

Many products of the surfing culture industry can be classed as 'symbolic tokens'; signs of allegiance in the project of self assembly (Bauman 1992: 195). But as this extract from an interview with Reid - an inland based surfer - illustrates, the relationship between the sign and signified is not one which the consumer necessarily accepts without reflection:

> When I first went to the coast I was conscious to make sure I had a Rip Curl or Billabong shirt ... it was the 'in' thing and to go to the coast and not have a Rip Curl shirt you'd be a tourist ... It took me a while ... I thought, why bother? I surf and so I don't bother anymore. I guess I was a sucker, a sheep (Versace 1993: 19-20).

As a person entering the surfing subculture Steve purchased the symbols which helped in the construction of a surfing identity. But once he had acquired the skills to surf, these symbols no longer seemed necessary, in fact he even felt a bit embarrassed at having used them in the first place. The companies' use of top surfers in their advertising and the sponsorship of talented locals all over the country ensures the use of their products as symbolic tokens by identity shoppers in the 'archive of styles' as well as neophytes like Steve. But while the top brands play a significant role in the construction of surfing identity, both within the culture and as it is presented to the outside, the use of the symbols they produce varies greatly.

Despite the best efforts of the Big 3, the mainstream success of these companies is enough for many surfers to shun these brands in favour of smaller, equally authentic companies when buying surf clothing (see Baker 1999). The accumulation of experience in their local surfing scene will inform the surfer as to the desirability of certain brands or styles of clothing within the area he or she lives. The diagram below (Fig. O) shows how the percentage of surfers who wear a lot of surf label clothing is much greater in the urban areas - where the symbolic tokens play a more significant role in differentiating a surfer from the broader community. The percentage decreases as these symbols play a less significant role - i.e. where an individual's identity as a surfer is more likely to be known amongst the smaller general population[87].

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[87] There are other factors which contribute to the use of surf labels (e.g. age and the amount of time in the subculture). Location provides a reasonable cross section of these variables. The point of presenting these graphs however, is not so much to make a statement about surfwear and the link with location type as to demonstrate the reflexive consumption of surfing culture; i.e. surfing

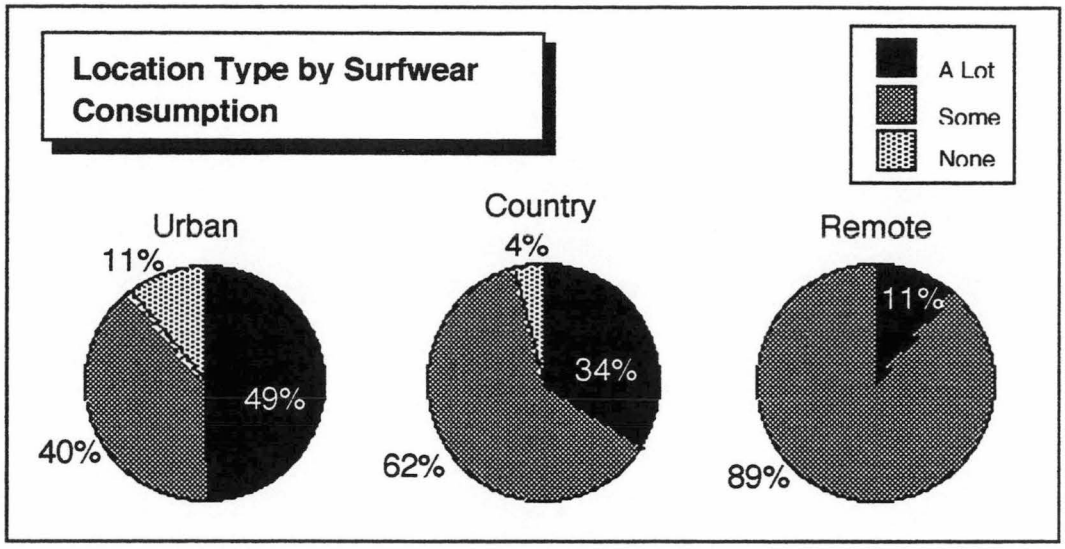


**Figure O:** Taken from the Questionnaire conducted for this study. The respondents were asked: Do you wear surf label clothing - a lot, some, or none?

The industry supplies an 'inventory of ends and pool of means' which go towards the 'self assembly' of a person's surfing identity (Bauman 1992: 191); mediated through the surfing media, and subject to the reflexivity of local surfing communities and peer groups (tribes and bands). As the individual gains knowledge of the subtleties of the local culture the use of symbols becomes refined. The same reflexive process is evident in regards to other areas of cultural production, including the representations of lifestyle, attitudes and behaviours which are mobilized to market the industry's products.

Surfing culture varies around the country; the particularities of each manifestation based on local (current and historical) factors. As Marcus (1992: 316) points out, "... collective and individual memory in its multiple traces and expressions is indeed the crucible for the local self-recognition of an identity". The industry's symbolic representation of surfing culture

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culture has not been overly homogenized by hypercommodification, the surfing media, and the dominance of the Big 3.

The inversion of the trend when it comes to the percentage of those who wore no surf label clothing could be explained as a reactionary consequence of the levels of commodification. While I believe this to be a valid hypothesis, there is an anomaly: At one of the remote areas visited questionnaires were not administered due to local hostility towards that kind of intrusion and so this site is not represented in the graph. Here the locals wore no surf label clothing that I saw, and I was told by one of them that it was considered 'very uncool' to do so. The culture at this location was more 'residual' than 'emergent' (Donnelly 1993), although its hardcore surfers and sacred site status clearly act as a resource for myths and legends in the broader emergent surfing subculture.

are accepted or rejected on these grounds through the communicative activity in surfing communities everywhere; be they small tightly configured enclaves or larger loosely configured communities more reliant on the symbolic realm.

Adorno (1991: 163-70) claimed, that the commodification of leisure limits the possibilities for escaping the commodity form, which leads to the notion of 'free time' becoming a parody of itself. But he conceded that while they consumed the products of the culture industry, some people were still politically and socially critical of the products: "I think that we can here glimpse a chance of maturity, which might just eventually help to turn free time into freedom proper". The evidence suggests that this kind of reflexive behaviour is an integral part of the surfing subculture; although clearly not at a level of discernment that would satisfy Adorno!

The area in which the surfing culture industry - in particular the Big 3 - exert the most influence on surfing culture is in the symbolic realm of the trans-global surfing nation. The characteristics of local surfing culture are conceived at the level of the tribe and the band (in a dialogue with the symbolic community in the surfing media), and in the individual's own creation of 'distinction' in the construction of a surfing identity. The production of local culture involves reflexivity, where the objects produced by the culture industry are treated as a resource:

> Every act of consumption is an act of cultural production, for consumption is always the production of meaning ... Detached from the strategies of capitalism ... [the commodity] becomes a resource for the culture of everyday life (Fiske 1989: 35).

But the surfing subculture doesn't manifest the kind of subversive use of its commodities sometimes associated with resistance; i.e. surfers don't use commodities such as legropes, for example, as fashion accessories in the way that punks used garbage bags or safety pins (Hebdidge 1991). The products of the surfing industries are not that 'polysemic' and there is no evidence of alternative use of the industry's products in this way.

It is possible to interpret this lack of room-to-move as an indication of the surfing culture industry's insider status; i.e. the industry's connection with the surfing experience results in products that meet or create market demands. Alternatively the industry might be seen as successfully

imposing uniformity; as Adorno (1991: 85) suggests: "The culture industry is the purposeful integration of its consumers from above". Others have argued in line with Adorno, claiming that since punk,

> ... [the] intensified commercialization of youthful leisure had brought about the manufacture of subcultural styles 'from above' ... thereby short-circuiting the processes of subcultural emergence 'from below' (McGuigan 1992: 100-1).

The notion of style being imposed from above is problematic when applied to the relationship between the surfing culture industry and the subculture's core members. As has been discussed, the industry evolved from within the subculture in such a way as to circumvent the kind of parent culture incorporation which would result in the imposition of style from a mainstream 'above'. However, the dominant role the Big 3 play in the creation of surfing style and other aspects of the culture could be interpreted as an imposition from above (albeit an *above* from *within* the subculture). The problem with this interpretation is that the acceptance or rejection of the industry's offerings are clearly a part of the cultural production process. And while the industry *is* a dominant player in the process it is not able to *impose* style unchallenged.

The processes of aestheticization are protecting the surfing subculture from stultifying commodification within a purely economically rational industry. As Adorno argued, the moment of critique has moved from the realm of the working class to the aesthetic realm, and it is a critique which finds its utopian moment, not in the construction of a new society but "...in that which eludes any sort of subsumption by the Same" (Lash & Urry 1994: 142-3). Adorno credited the flow of signs from the culture industry with providing material for aesthetic critique conducive to "... niche marketed individualization ... [and] authentic aesthetic-reflexive individualization". On the production side this opens up and helps reproduce a space distinct from the 'behemoths' of the mainstream culture-industry, whereby "... meaningful aesthetic critique can be launched" (Lash and Urry 1994: 143).

The surfing culture industry's links with the subculture, particularly those created and maintained through the corporate style of the Big 3, provide the structural basis for what Giddens (1994) calls 'institutional reflexivity', which relies upon 'active trust';

> Active trust is trust that has to be energetically treated and sustained. It is at the origin of new forms of social solidarity today, in contexts ranging from intimate personal ties right through to global systems of interaction (Giddens 1994: 186).

Lash (1994: 200-9) prefers to describe the situation more in terms of a breakdown of institutional boundaries as a result of disorganized capitalism and a 'reflexive modernity'. His assessment of the outcome is also consistent with the kind of interaction evident between the industry and the subculture in which it is situated, whereby "... both institutions and artefacts are attuned to the sensibility of the lay population ...".

*The Big 3 & the Dilemma of Growth*

The growth of the Big 3 companies has been prodigious. But continued growth produces a particular dilemma for the surfing culture industry in Australia. The way in which these companies manage this dilemma has significant implications for the integrity of the subculture; i.e. its survival as a social entity distinct from the postmodernizing mainstream culture.

The Big 3's dominance of the subculture market in Australia is such that, despite their efforts outlined above, they risk being seen as too successful (Baker 1999; and Goatley 1998). The ambivalence evident in the subsection on Dominance (above) is indicative of their problems in this regard. One area of growth which does not necessarily create this problem is that of women. They have always existed as an untapped market within the subculture and therefore catering for them may not be seen as an expansion beyond the subculture. In the past 2 years the industry has aggressively targeted young women through promotions which depict them as active and competent surfers. For example, *Jetty Surf*, a large retail chain, opened its new shop in Hobart in the summer of 1999/2000 with all but one of its display posters of surfing action (which are two stories high) of women surfing. The same trend was evident in approximately 20 other surf shops visited in New South Wales and Victoria early in 2000. But while this area of growth may not be interpreted as 'selling out' it never-the-less creates problems in the longer term for the industry through its promotion of active participation in surfing and the potential for overcrowding this entails (see below).

The potential for growth in overseas markets is still considerable, but their success in this arena threatens to weaken their connections with their

subcultural base in Australia. Even more of a threat is expansion into mainstream markets, but as the owner of one of the country's largest surfboard retail outlets, said: "If you only sold surfwear to surfers, you wouldn't have much of an industry" (Collins 1997: 40). Expansion into the mainstream is problematic on a number of fronts; first conspicuous marketing to outsiders could critically damage the credibility of the companies within the surfing community. As the general manager of a sports management firm points out; "Their biggest challenge as they grow and become 'really' popular is to maintain the image that they are not mass appeal brands" (in Goatley 1998: 73). A second problem stems from the fact that as a consequence (intentional or not) of marketing surfing culture in the mainstream, surfing is promoted as an attractive leisure lifestyle. But there is a limit to the number of surfers that can be crammed into the sea at any given surf break before the fun disappears and aggression dominates in the struggle for waves to ride (see Chapter 4). The surfing experience is already diminished in many areas by overcrowding and so growth endangers the very foundation of the industry - and the subculture.

Another possibility for growth is to expand laterally; to set up mirror pyramids (see Fig. N) in similar lifestyle niches. All of the Big 3 have moved into the snowboarding market in this way. The similarities between surfing and skiing are obvious and surfers have been involved in the development of snowboarding from the beginning (Doyle 1994; Humphreys 1996). One marketing strategy involves images of snowboarders superimposed on waves and surfers 'riding' snow covered mountains. One of the companies holds combined surf and snowboard competitions. Linking the two activities through these strategies not only smooths over any trouble in regard to the companies' insider status, but also expands sales by introducing more surfers to snowboarding (and visa versa), with all the associated functional and fashion accessories, as well as tapping into the existing snowboarding market.

Now there are two pillars for each company; one embedded in the surfing experience and the other in the snowboarding experience. This move can be viewed as the first tentative steps beyond the home territory, with only a symbolic life-line linking them to their roots in the surfing experience. But it is not a leap into the hyper space of postmodern two

dimensionality, it is more like an engineering project connecting with ecstatic foundations in the snowboarding experience, using a familiar formula and taking their credibility in the surfing culture with them as they go, as this excerpt from a *Rip Curl* catalogue demonstrates:

> Rip Curl makes products for the Search - products for anybody with that itch that can't quite be scratched.
>
> Any Surfer, any Body Boarder, any Skier, any Snowboarder who dreams of the magical thrill of discovery and the gripping rush that'll never let go.
>
> Search until you die (Hynd et al. 1994: 40).

The potential to repeat this move into other similar leisure lifeworld niche markets is clearly quite substantial. The challenge here is to establish links between the core groups across different subcultures. The creation and maintenance of insider status would seem to be harder the further the strategy is stretched.

The dedifferentiation of boundaries between snowboarding and surfing needs to be followed by the construction of new boundaries which include the two subcultures. This is highly problematic due to obvious geographic factors alone in many areas and only a minority of surfers would have the financial resources to participate in both activities. The strategy therefore requires surfers to 'share' their symbolic realm with outsiders in a more profound way than has previously been the case; i.e. not only surfers know the feeling. *Quiksilver* already appear to have taken steps in this direction by adopting the slogan 'The Boardriding Co.' The generic 'board' covering surf, snow, skate, sail, wake and body boards. The companies risk alienating themselves from the majority of surfers (and probably snowboarders etc.) if they continue with this strategy. Further, if this dedifferentiation of surfing's boundaries were to become integrated into the surfing media (i.e. target snowboarders, skaters etc. as part of their audience) it would threaten the integrity of the symbolic community - the surfing nation - by alienating it from the tribes, bands and individual surfers, the vast majority for whom snowboarding is not a viable option.

Another avenue for expansion emerges should the companies sever any tangible connection with their subcultural roots and trade on their global image as leisure wear labels, expanding into other sport and leisure wear markets. This posses different risks for the Big 3; could they manage the

transformation while inevitably losing at least a substantial portion of their core market? The significance of such a move for the subculture depends on many factors. It is unlikely that all three companies would choose this path as the absence of one or two from dominance within the subculture would provide room for the other(s) to expand internally. There are also many other players with acceptable subcultural pedigrees to the Big 3 to fill any gap in supply of authentic cultural goods (Goatley 1998; Baker 1999). The differentiated status of the subculture would be challenged if the company(s) that moved into the mainstream managed to carry enough elite surfers with them to validate the move for a significant number of core surfers. Even so this would substantially diminish the companies' claims for insider status, and deconstruct the symbolic barriers which had kept mainstream brands out of the subculture market. Such a move has the potential to challenge the resilience of the subculture.

So far their careful dalliance with the mainstream market has been one in which the appearance of keeping a distance is maintained. At the same time however, another sector of the surfing subculture, the surfing bureaucracy, in particular *Surfing Australia Inc.* , has steadily progressed their aim of gaining entree into the realm of mainstream sport. The Big 3's links with this process are clear, participating as promoters and sponsors of competitions and professional surfers. The President of *Quiksilver International,* Rod Brooks, is also the President of *Surfing Australia Inc.* The increase in mainstream media exposure as a result of sportization (and particularly professionalization) is the main route the companies take to promote their labels in the mainstream. Their expansion into that market is clearly linked with the progress of sportization.

Should surfing as a mainstream sport come to dominate the surfing subculture, in the way that it already has in some urban areas, then the companies' moves into the mainstream could be a simple matter of 'progress'. The rationalization of surfing would release the companies from their ties with the counter culture. However, as has been demonstrated in other areas of this study, a simplistic dichotomy between rational and aesthetic modes - between modern and postmodern - has been an inadequate framework for analyzing past developments and is therefore unlikely to prove a useful means of analyzing the current situation or future prospects.

The Big 3 still promote their links with the counter cultural ethos and an abandonment of this would not only damage their ties with the subculture but also their appeal in the mainstream market, who purchase the symbolic tokens of a 'subversive' or at least 'untrammeled' lifestyle, not a mainstream sport.

## Conclusion

Clarke et al. (1976: 188) argue that a subculture's style exists within a 'total life-style' package, and that once commodified it becomes a 'novel consumption style'; what postmodern theorists might consider as free floating symbols in the 'archive of styles' (Crook et al. 1992). Through the commercial nexus with its parent culture, the surfing subculture becomes less threatening and the subversive meanings attached to the symbolic tokens it markets to the general public may become diluted, but they are not emptied of meaning. Nor is this commercial infiltration of the mainstream simply a matter of 'winning space' (McGuigan 1992: 96).

Surfing style is not free floating, it is attached to something 'real', and while the parent culture required an acceptable image in order to justify engagement with the subculture, once achieved surfing's oppositional image was appropriated through its commodified style (see Humphreys 1996; and Goatley 1998), much more so than the rationalized sporting image; an example of resistance via incorporation. The postmodern link between aestheticization and commodification is clearly a crucial factor in this 'Trojan Horse' infiltration of the parent culture.

The Big 3 company logos function as symbols of surfing subculture, both in the mainstream and within the subculture itself. These symbols can be seen as signifying a hyperreal culture, a culture which was manufactured through the media as a commodified simulation of a non existent ancient culture. But as an example of Baudrillard's (1988b) 'pure simulacra', surfing is an anomaly at least, if not an example of the inadequacy of his theory, because in the midst of this hyperreal, the subculture is based upon shared knowledge of embodied experience. *The dominant companies (and the majority of smaller companies) in the surfing culture industry connect with that foundational transcendence and contribute to the maintenance of the*

*cultural and social transcendence in the very process of commodifying the culture.* The manner in which the Big 3 have set the standard for the surfing industry's relationship with the subculture can be seen as constituting what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) call 'coercive isomorphism', whereby organizations replicate the structural/cultural form of dominant organizations in order to be seen as legitimate. It is as a result of this isomorphism that the current industry culture may outlive the reign of the Big 3's founding (surfer) entrepreneurs, and thus avoid the trajectory from charismatic leadership to bureaucratic institutions.

While the creative process involved in the surfing culture industry is also anchored in the subculture then it will remain an integral part of the culture it helps to define. Maffesoli understands this process well:

> Common experience gives rise to the formation of value: this is a vector of creation. It makes no difference whether this occurs at a macro or micro level, whether it takes place in the sphere of production or the environment or communication or lifestyle. The collective force (puissance) creates a work of art (Maffesoli 1991: 9).

Rather than an invasion of the surfing lifeworld (Habermas 1987), the industry functions as a crucial component of that lifeworld.

The commodification of the surfing subculture has been at the heart of its development; a process driven from within and inexorably linked with the surfing aesthetic. It is so pervasive that there is no part of the culture which has not been affected; no uncommodified space with which to contrast it. Even the foundational transcendent experience is commodified through the Big 3's promotions. This dedifferentiation of base and superstructure is a well recognized postmodern phenomenon (e.g. Jameson 1991; Lash 1990; Crook et al. 1992; Kumar 1995). As noted earlier, Lash (1990: 197) describes it as the colonization of the commodity by culture, and Jameson (1991: xv) claims that culture "... cleaves almost too close to the skin of the economic to be stripped off and inspected in its own right". Extending Crook et al.'s (1992) model of postmodernization (see my diagrammatic representation - Fig. I) it might be described as a process of decommodification.

> ... having ceased to be relative to its opposite (the true to the false, the beautiful to the ugly, the real to the imaginary), it becomes superlative, positively sublime as if it had absorbed the energy of its opposite (Baudrillard 1988a: 186-7).

Decommodification might seem too strong a term to use, especially since the surfing culture industry is a major focus of debate within the subculture's reflexive processes. However, the fact that the culture is inexplicably linked to the industry appears to be unproblematic for the vast majority of surfers since the major players in the industry have so far successfully maintained their 'insider' status. They have done this through their activities in both the symbolic and 'real' worlds of the surfing subculture.

A consequence of the insider status of the surfing companies is that they are subject to the ramifications of their own actions manifest *in* the subculture in a more profound way than simply through the fluctuations of the market; i.e. the institutional reflexivity (Giddens 1994) of the companies is a product of the reflexivity of surfers themselves, active in the consumption and production of surfing culture. For Lash (1994) this is a result of the breakdown of boundaries between institutions and their constituents while for Giddens (1994) it is a part of the process of creating and maintaining active trust between the two. In the case of surfing the interaction between the major companies and the surfing population has involved active trust from the beginning. The industry is a subset of the subculture and the individuals involved in the industry are largely a subset of the general surfing population. The boundaries, to the extent that they exist, have been constructed in the context of trust and an aesthetic reflexivity, which is active within the industry, inherent in the corporate culture of its dominant players, and in the surfing subculture generally.

While the surfing culture industry's (in particular the Big 3) position within the surfing subculture does not go unchallenged, the challenges are largely openly debated, if not in the media then within the various levels and sectors of surfing communities. This argumentation is a part of the dynamic process by which the subculture is continually thinking about and redefining itself. The Big 3 recognize the need to keep in touch with their constituents because their position within the subculture - and hence to a large extent their market share in the mainstream - is contingent upon the perception that they are an integral part of the subculture. Surfers have withdrawn their trust/support in the past when companies have failed to maintain their subcultural connections.

The continued expansion of the Big 3's markets threatens to break the 'active trust' cultivated within the subculture and consequently the mainstream surfing culture market as well. It also threatens the integrity of the subculture as a distinct entity separate from the parent culture. Should there be a significant shift into the mainstream the consequences range from negligible to extreme, depending on a range of factors too numerous to account for in this analysis - including the extent of the shift, the manner in which it was executed, the response of remaining companies, and the response of the media. At the extreme end of possible outcomes the inverted pyramid constructed by the Big 3 would collapse and the symbolic realm of differentiation they maintained disappear. But once again it is important to recognize the postmodern context in which these processes are occurring. The corporate culture of the Big 3 is an example of postmodern aestheticization, and the movement towards mainstream incorporation is an aestheticization process itself; i.e. the aestheticization of the mainstream. Consequently the likely impact of these dialectical machinations on the subculture is unclear.

While the industry plays a substantial role in promoting surfing in the parent culture, it does so via the construction of symbolic boundaries between the subculture and the mainstream; i.e. it markets symbolic tokens of surfing which declare its difference. The affinity the industry has with its subculture comes from a largely internal reflexivity (to the subculture) and the dedifferentiated subcultural habitus. The construction of subcultural boundaries are in the interest of the industry and subculture to which it belongs. This picture of 'oppositional postmodernism', which favours community and collective identity (Lash 1990: 137-8), is constituted via an aesthetic anchored in the shared experience of the sublime. This postmodern form is in conflict however with a concurrent 'mainstream postmodernism', which favours market governance and individual distinction (Lash 1990: 137-8), and to which the surfing culture industry is also linked through the arena of competitive surfing.

In the following chapter I discuss the consequences of this dialectic for the integrity of the subculture and its social configurations, and the prospect of postmodern synthesis.

*Postscript:*

In the month prior to submission of this thesis there have been two significant developments which have not been canvassed. They don't challenge the above analysis, rather they add to the complexity and I leave it to the reader to contemplate the implications; in particular companies' responsibilities to non-surfing shareholders, and the prospect of take-overs by other mainstream companies:

- *Quiksilver International* (Australia) has been taken over by *Quiksilver Inc.* - the publicly owned US franchise. Founders, Green and Law, while retaining large personal share holdings, will no longer have a controlling interest.
- *Billabong* has announced that it is to be floated on the Australian stock exchange.

# CHAPTER 8
# AESTHETICIZATION & SPORTIZATION: TOWARDS A SYNTHESIS IN SURFING

> *The contest circuit will always offer its judgements on performance, but the ultimate expression of what it attempts to quantify is something that will forever take place somewhere else, on a beach with no banners.*
>
> (Jack Finlay 1992: 24)

As I have indicated in previous chapters, there has been a dialectical conflict within the surfboard riding subculture between the imperative to play, and the imperative to order that play, since its early beginnings. This conflict mirrors that within the surf lifesaving subculture which resulted in surfboard riders breaking away from the SLSA; and earlier still the conflict between those who wished to bathe at will in the sea and the local council authorities which regulated the activity. This chapter examines the implications that the bureaucratization, juridification and commodification - inherent in sportization - have for surfing.

This is an important theme in the study of leisure subcultures (Devall 1973; Donnelly 1988 & 1993; Humphreys 1996; Midol & Broyer 1995), which in this study takes on added theoretical significance since it focuses directly on the clash between a modern process - that of sportization - and the surfing subculture as an agent of postmodernization. The significance for the analysis of the surfing subculture lies in how the instrumental rationality - indicative of sportization as a modern process - is manifest in this postmodern(izing) habitus; i.e. whether it stifles the sublime experience, thereby undermining social formations, or whether a more benign synthesis emerges out of the dialectical clash.

Utilizing Habermas' (1987) concept of 'colonization', the dynamics of resistance and incorporation are first examined; both in the internal processes of sportization and in the subculture's interaction with the parent culture. Next, in the context of a broader postmodernization, current trends are discussed and the possibility of synthesis between the aesthetic and rational imperatives in surfing's sportization are speculated upon.

Elias and Dunning (1986: 50-1) acknowledge activities like surfing as sports which engage in a controlled battle with nature. My use of the term 'sportization' differs somewhat from Elias and Dunning as it is specifically aimed at describing the process of control which competition brings to the playful, 'untrammelled' act of surfing, rather than the 'controlled decontrolling' of emotions, violence or danger, of Elias and Dunning's (1986) original work. Pearson (1979: 171) recognized a process of 'athleticization' in surfing, and I intend that the concept of sportization used here include this concept within its field of meaning; i.e. not only the ordering of the activity into a competitive game, but an instrumentally rational approach to the sport, involving training, practice, and, in a broad sense, professionalism.

The surfing culture industry is found to play a key role in the sportization of surfing. The process is generally one which fosters bureaucratization, juridification, and commodification; both from within the subculture and from the parent culture. Two divergent trends in the sportization process are discussed and the possibility of a split along the lines of 'oppositional' and 'mainstream' postmodern forms (Lash 1990) is speculated upon. I suggest that rather than diffusion of the culture, such a split could result in a replication of the grounded neo-tribal model presented in Chapter 5, characterized by foundational, cultural and social transcendence specific to the differentiated subgroups.

## Bureaucratization & Juridification

Habermas (1987) argues that juridification is an inevitable consequence of economic growth.

> This thesis of internal colonization states that the subsystems of the economy and state become more and more complex as a consequence of capitalist growth, and penetrate ever deeper into the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld (Habermas 1987: 367).

His thesis claims that commodification and bureaucratization (and inherent juridification) force individuals to relate to each other as parties to contracts and as participants within legal frameworks rather than free agents. The only hope Habermas sees to repel this 'colonization of the lifeworld' is for a reconstitution of its public spheres and the freeing up of the flow of communication.

> Whatever faint and 'unrealistic' hopes for emancipation there are must now reside in 'silent revolutions', youth subcultures and 'new politics' which emerge from the communicative sphere of the lifeworld (Crook et al. 1992: 28).

Following my arguments in the previous chapter, the hypercommodification of the surfing subculture does not constitute a colonization of the surfing lifeworld by the economic system. Instead the subculture has been constituted to a significant degree in a dialogue between the surfing culture industry and the broader subculture from its early days - what Habermas might call 'communicative action' and others 'reflexivity' (Beck et al. 1994). As a result of the closed subculture market which the Big 3 in particular have managed to secure, colonization from the parent culture has not occurred to any significant extent. The most important factor in this reflexive processes is the industry's integration within the subculture's social structure; its nexus with the foundational, cultural, and social transcendence.

The link between commodification and bureaucratization is evident however, and even exploited by *Surfing Australia Inc.* (ex ASA) in their proposals for government funding:

> The ASA believes that the decision regarding funding for surfing needs to be looked at in the context of support for or investment in the grass roots structure for the whole surfing industry, ... using the sport as a catalyst maintaining a vibrant image to support industry development here and overseas (Brooks & Atkins 1993: 4).

The potential consequences for the subculture of escalating bureaucratization are just as significant as for commodification. In this section I show that historically the sportization of surfing has been characterized by bureaucratization and juridification imposed from within the subculture, and from the mainstream.

The link between commodification and bureaucratization, and its inherent juridification, became apparent fairly early through the surfing culture industry's sponsorship of surfers. Initially these contracts were innocuous informal agreements which usually required nothing more than brand loyalty. These forms of sponsorship still exist today at the bottom end of the scale, where it involves high profile surfers in a limited or local sense, or small companies like surfboard manufacturers. But the amount of money involved at the top end has increased along with the size of the

industry, and top ranked professional surfers can earn millions of dollars in sponsorship deals. This results in the kind of contractual relationship mentioned above. Wayne Bartholomew (National Coaching Director for *Surfing Australia Inc.*) recounts an argument he had over the future career of a young sponsored surfer:

> [*Quiksilver*] wanted him to be this wild, free surfer and they basically offered to buy him a house and set him up for life if he stayed amateur and just went on this free [soul] surfing program. I knew that he was competitive and that he wanted to be world champion (Bartholomew & Baker 1996: 272).

But while the contractual arrangements can be constraining, they affect relatively few, elite surfers.

More significant for this study is the impact, actual or potential, on a broader cross section of the surfing population through the activities of the surfing bureaucracy, the imposition of order from governing bodies outside the surfing subculture, and the opportunity it presents for mainstream company infiltration of the subculture via sponsorship of competitions and individual competitors (particularly women). These mainstream sponsors and external bureaucracies provide another avenue for the commodification and bureaucratization of the lifeworld, only this time from outside - from the parent culture - a culture remote from the *conscience collectif*, the surfing aesthetic, and the internal reflexivity of the subculture.

### *The Surfing Bureaucracy*

As I have already pointed out (Chapter 4), the ASA was formed in response to growing opposition to surfing from the parent culture.

> The idea in the formation of the A.S.A. is to divide Australia's surfing beaches into equal districts ... Each district will be controlled by three District Directors and surfers with any surf problems can advise these Directors who will bring the matter before the A.S.A General Committee - Dennis Colette [ASA Secretary] (Colette 1963).

But the ASA soon backed away from the regimented control outlined by Colette, and the clubs were not mainstream organizations in the mould of the SLSA. While their competitive programs provided a 'legitimate' focus for local surfing communities, the clubs were also sites of localism, conflicts with the SLSA, drug taking and other subversive activities (Bartholomew & Baker 1996; and Carroll & Wilcox 1994). In an interview

with the president of one of the oldest clubs I was told that things had changed, and that they now enforced a code of conduct for their members:

> Every now and then we get invited to [local] council functions because we have a good image now. ... Surfing has changed to fit into the mainstream and surfing is now a school sport. Kids are groomed through school and club competition. ... Parents bring their kids to join us like the lifesaving or rugby clubs; we're seen in the same light. ... We have combined competitions with the clubbies [SLSA]; there was a split once but not now (Reid interview 1995).

The ASA, now called *Surfing Australia Inc.*, is the peak bureaucratic body in surfing, with financially autonomous branches in each State; all incorporated companies (e.g. *Surfing Tasmania Inc.*). The membership in 1993 was approximately 25,000[88], which includes affiliated club members (Brooks & Atkins 1993). A press release announcing the name change for the association emphasized its claim to represent all of the surfing public and not just its members:

> ... the new title "Surfing Australia" promotes our umbrella identity representing the interests of the disciplines of surfboard, longboard, bodyboard and kneeboard and dealing with coaching, historical, educational, environmental, indigenous surfing and safety issues for our members and the general recreation surfing public (Atkins 1996).

Claiming this broader constituency is no doubt important if the association is to justify its claim to be "... the National controlling body of surfing in Australia ..." ('Mission Statement' in *Surfing Australia Inc.* 1996) for the purposes of negotiations with government bodies, securing government funding, and mainstream private sector sponsorship. The organization's members are those involved in their competitive program, and constitute between 20 and 30 percent of the core surfing population[89]. In recent years they have endeavoured to boost membership by encouraging non competitors to join as 'registered surfers'. In Tasmania for example, this was promoted as a means of assisting *Surfing Tasmania Inc.'s* proposal for government approval and funding to construct an artificial reef (*Surfing Tasmania Inc.* 1998).

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[88] Membership is estimated to be the same in 2000 (correspondence with *Surfing Australia inc.*)

[89] This range is based on the estimate of 80,000 core surfers and the 25,000 members (31%), the 19% of my questionnaire respondents who reported that they were involved in competition, and the 23% who claimed to be members of a club or organization of some kind. Membership is 1.2% of the 2.16 million Australians quoted in *Surfing Australia Inc.* (1996: 5) as "... surfing in at least a recreation sense". NOTE: The use of 'recreation' here refers to the broadest possible category of play in the surf and not surfers as a distinct group.

Since 1983 'Surf League' has been a major focus of club activities. Under the umbrella of *Surfing Australia Inc.*, and sponsored by *Quiksilver*, the league is a national interclub competition with plans to internationalize. There are plans to provide financial and administrative assistance to the clubs to 'further the expansion of the League'.

> Just like football, cricket, netball and basketball codes, Surf League has all the ingredients to become a mainstream competition. ... [Options] include: Television coverage ... merchandising ... community involvement ... corporate sponsorship ... club colours, mascots and titles ... Mainstream advertising (*Surf League* 1994)[90].

This program of sportization works towards the juridification of surfing beyond the lifeworld of competitors, especially when organizations and clubs gain control of surfing locations (through Local Council permits) in order to hold their competitions. According to Tullemans (1997), non-competitors are bluffed by the organizer's council permits, embarrassed over loud hailers, and physically intimidated into leaving the water by the 'competition patrol' when organizers decide to hold their contest at a certain surf break.

> While the ... [non-competitive] surfers as a group are by and large in majority and the ones that keep the surf industry and the sponsored hot shots in financial support, they are the least organized, and are and will continue to be the ones whose rights to enjoy a recreational [read 'free'] surf are constantly imposed upon by the wave hogging contest singlet minority (Tullemans 1997: 49).

Protests by indignant local surfers refusing to leave the water do occur. In Margaret River an association of recreational surfers have disrupted contests and lobbied against the number of contests being held at the site. The shire council's adviser on surfing said that the group had affected council policy in this regard and there was a limit placed on the number of contest permits granted each year (Thompson interview 1995).

***The Mainstream Bureaucracy***

Any attempt at gaining funding, permits or approvals from the state carries with it the risk of state intervention in the subculture. One surfing official (with a B.A. degree in recreational administration) suggested that the move towards sportization had been accelerated by the establishment of government departments of sport and recreation after Australia's

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[90] Surf League has folded in recent years with *Quiksilver's* withdrawal of sponsorship. However inter and intra club competition continues on a smaller scale.

failure to win 'gold' at the Montreal Olympics; "... there are no votes in recreation but there are in getting gold medals. ... So to get money for development you need to be a sport" (Boast interview 1995). Recognition of surfing as an Olympic sport is expected to bring a lot more government funding to *Surfing Australia Inc.* for their athletic programs

The following extract from a letter to the International Surfing Association (ISA) from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) illustrates the implications for juridification as a result of surfing's probationary recognition as an Olympic sport in 1995:

> It is my pleasure to inform you that, today, the 104th Session of the International Olympic Committee, held in Budapest, has ratified the decision of the IOC Executive Board to grant recognition to the International Surfing Federation (ISA), as a *Recognized Federation,* pursuant to Rule 29 of the Olympic Charter.
>
> I should remind you that this recognition will be provisional for a two-year period. At the end of such period, the recognition shall automatically lapse in the absence of definitive confirmation given in writing by the IOC.
>
> I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you for all the efforts made in order to reach this goal and welcome you in the Olympic Family (Juan Antonio Samaranch: June 15, 1995)[91].

Juridification also increases indirectly as a result of lobbying for sports funding from State and Federal government departments in competition with other mainstream sporting bodies. In order to achieve government funding *Surfing Australia Inc.* must represent itself as the legitimate controlling body of surfing in Australia and demonstrate a well administered sporting program worthy of public funding. The 1992/93 Australian Sports Commission grant to the organization was $172,000 and as Atkins (1993) points out, "[t]hese grants are subject to stringent conditions and tests ...". *Surfing Australia Inc.* presents itself as a sound bureaucratic organization, overseeing an athleticized sport. It is able to demonstrate this through its surfing schools, coaching accreditation programs, its affiliation with the International Surfing Association (ISA), the General Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF) and the Association of Surfing Professionals (ASP), IOC recognition, and the various levels of competition it is associated with, including club based

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[91] *Surfing Australia Inc.* is now a recognized Federation of the Australian Olympic Committee. This recognition does not involve participation in the games, funding or voting rights.

championships, Surf League, and the Australian Championship Surfing Circuit (ACC), a career path to professional surfing, and an impressive record of Australian success in the sport.

As integration with the mainstream increases so too does the potential for the surfing subculture to be subject to the agendas of mainstream bureaucracies beyond those associated with sport (e.g. 'equal opportunity' for women surfers). An example of the abstruse way this might occur can be seen in a report commissioned by the Surf Coast Shire on the economic impact of the 1995 Rip Curl Pro and Quit Women's Classic surfing competitions, held at Bells Beach. It claimed that, as a direct result of holding the contests, the Shire benefited from an increase in expenditure of $2.11 million. The report recommended that the council become more involved in the event to ensure that it 'maximised its potential' and that the Shire take advantage of the opportunity to increase the profile of its tourism attractions. It also recommended that the Shire "... establish a carnival type atmosphere at the Event by introducing other activities, displays etc." (Ernst and Young 1995).

*Mainstream Sponsorship*

Mainstream sponsorship of surfing competitions has been a part of the scene since the early 1960s amateur events (e.g. Ampol sponsored the National titles in 1964) (Jarratt 1999), and Coca Cola and Sydney radio station 2SM sponsored one of the first professional events in 1974. These arrangements expose the subculture to the kind of interference Habermas (1987) warns against in his colonization thesis (see Donnelly 1993 and Humphreys 1996 for other sports subculture examples).

Pearson (1979) claimed that this form of 'commercialization' was one of the main factors in progressing the athleticization of surfing, and even determining its form.

> This was directly the case where commercial interests sponsored surfing contests and were among the main forces in the development of standards of judging competition (Pearson 1979: 192).

A similar point was made by Rod Brooks, who said that surfing competitions had suffered in the past because the mainstream sponsors had wanted them held at popular city beaches in summer where they would attract the biggest crowds. Because of the time of year the surf was

often very small and uninteresting for competitors and spectators alike (Brooks interview 1995).

A proposal by CSI (one of the largest television sports producers in the world) to secure the exclusive rights to broadcast the professional tour, involved taking control of the sport's marketing and securing the rights to half the signage at the events (which would be on-sold to other companies). The proposal was eventually rejected by the Association of Surfing Professionals (ASP), even though it was a particularly lucrative deal for the pro surfers themselves, apparently because they didn't want to hand over control of their sport and its public image to outsiders (Pawle 1997 & 1998).

> They [the ASP] wanted a show that captured the essence of surfing rather than producing a show that was commercially attractive to a wide audience. ... We [CSI] were trying to distribute surfing worldwide and sell it to people who didn't really get the essence of surfing, but they got what was an attractive, presentable show (CSI executive in Pawle 1998: 7).

The surfers had been lobbied by the Big 3 (and Coca Cola - a long time sponsor of surfing) to reject the deal. The industry felt that CSI could not be trusted to present surfing to the general public in the way surfers would want, and clearly they were at risk of losing their positions of power within surfing's sporting arena (Pawle 1997 & 1998).

> The companies realized that their hegemony was going to be compromised because CSI was about to go out there in the big corporate world and find the Nikes and so forth and bring them into the fold (Cassidy - competition promoter - in Pawle 1998: 8).

It is not necessary to interpret the activities of the surfing companies as anything more than protecting their markets, in order to recognize these actions as repelling quite a substantial risk of colonization. Barton Lynch, a pro surfer on the ASP board at the time, is now quite cynical of the industry's motives but still maintains that the Big 3 are the sports 'best bet':

> If there's anyone who understands and shares the vision of what pro surfing should be, as the surfers generally feel it should be, it's the surf companies because they sell, promote and live off the same image. They are the perfect partners (in Pawle 1998: 7).

The problems associated with CSI and other mainstream promoters and sponsors stem from a lack of connection with the surfing aesthetic. In

contrast recent developments in surfing competitions have been pioneered by *Quiksilver* and *Billabong*. Both companies have held competitions at remote sites, chosen for their quality of surf and congruity with the global surfing aesthetic. Instead of spectators, these contests are staged for media coverage, reaching the public through video and television sports news. The size of the companies is now such that they are able to take these initiatives whereas in the past outside sponsorship was essential for any large event.

These 'aestheticized' contests will be addressed in more detail in the following section. The point I wish to make here is the contrast between the distortion of surfing culture which can result from the intrusion of mainstream sponsors and the product which has emerged out of the internal reflexivity of the subculture.

***Section Summary***

The sportization of surfing, and the integration with the mainstream which it involves, results in the juridification of the lifeworld; primarily for those involved in surfing competitions and club activities, but also for the broader surfing population. The latter group are affected directly when they are excluded from surfing in areas where competitions are being held. They are affected indirectly through the appropriation and manipulation of the subculture's image for the purposes of promoting surfing as a mainstream sport; the result of which is a potential weakening of subcultural boundaries.

*Surfing Australia Inc.'s* program of sportization includes an attempt to integrate surfing culture within the dominant sports culture. The organization aims to have surfing accepted as a mainstream sport, with mainstream recognition, government funding and private sector sponsorship. While their interaction with the surfing population is substantially restricted to those surfers involved in surfing as an athletic sport - either competitors, sponsors, or those attending their surfing schools - the organization is staffed by surfers and, like the surfing culture industry, retains its connection with the ecstatic experience and the subculture's neo-tribal forms of sociation. The surfing companies have also been involved in the sportization process, through their support and sponsorship of competitors and competitions. But they have a much

broader constituency than *Surfing Australia inc.*, and their reflexive engagement with the general surfing population has lead to an aestheticization of competitive surfing.

Any suggestion of a clear cut alignment between the companies and oppositional postmodernism on the one hand, and *Surfing Australia Inc.* and mainstream postmodernism on the other, is problematic given the intimate connections between the two sectors of the subculture. And yet the two forms of competition appear to be differentiated along these lines. In the following section the complexity of the oppositional and mainstream forms of sportization is explored.

## Synthesis & the Sporting Aesthetic

Competitive surfing provides a major point of engagement with the parent culture - an arena in the dialectic between the postmodern surfing subculture and the postmodernizing mainstream. The kind of conflict involved in the sportization of surfing has been described as a dichotomy between athletic and play sports (Pearson 1979). The section above focussed upon the rational ordering which sportization brings to surfing, and this perspective seems to support such an approach. However, in this section I examine sportization in the context of postmodernization, and the consequences for the embodied experience, surfing's social configurations, and subcultural integrity. I suggest that even in the rational ordering of surfing, the current postmodern form of aestheticization allows for the integration of transcendent experience, and hence the replication of the surfing's grounded neo-tribalism outside the subculture's current boundaries.

First I discuss the current state of the internal struggle between soul surfing and competitive surfing. I then examine the possibilities for retaining the experience of self transcendence in any synthesis which emerges out of the dialectical process. I find that there is evidence of two distinct syntheses; one a product of an internal dialogue between soul surfing and competitive surfing, and the other the product of a dialogue between competitive surfing and the postmodernizing mainstream.

*Dedifferentiated Dichotomies & Emergent Dialectics*

There are many theorists who bemoan the professionalization of sport. Huizinga (1949: 197-8), for example, argued that the spirit of professionalism had replaced the carefree spontaneity of play: "... sport has become profane, 'unholy' in every way ... The old play-factor has undergone almost complete atrophy". Like Huizinga, Bourdie (1990) believes that professionalism turns amateurs into passive spectators. As the gap between amateur and professional practice widens he says that amateurs are embarrassed into taking on this passive role. From the point of view of the participants, Caillois (1961: 6) states; "As for professionals ... it is clear that they are not players but workers. When they play, it is at some other game".

Booth (1995) points out that amateurism has never really been a significant part of competitive surfing, because sponsorships and other endorsements have always been present at every level. While amateur and professional rankings do exist, *Surfing Australia Inc.* is working towards deconstructing what they consider to be an artificial distinction (Brooks interview 1995). As Dunning (1986: 205) notes, amateurism in sport generally is being gradually but inexorably superseded by "... attitudes, values and structures that are 'professional' in one sense or another of that term". The outcome of this dedifferentiation is that the focus of critique has shifted.

The postmodern dedifferentiation of work and leisure (of which the dedifferentiation of professional and amateur surfing is an example) is reflected in the shift in Schiller's (1982) tension between the 'sense-drive' (an aesthetic orientation) and the 'form-drive' (a drive to order), from the amateur/professional debate to a broader dialectic between competitive and soul surfing. As noted previously, this same shift is common to other activities which retain a connection with a non-competitive form, and like surfing do not *need* competition in order to thrive as a leisure activity; e.g. snowboarding (Humphreys 1996), climbing (Donnelly 1993), and skiing (Midol & Broyer (1995). In other words, these are activities which have not been fully sportized.

The focus of the aesthetic/rational dialectic in leisure activities has shifted often in the past and Caillois' (1961) theory of 'games' accommodates this

phenomenon. Caillois (1961: 13) says that games are played somewhere on a continuum between the chaos of *paidia*, where "... turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety is dominant", and the order of *ludus*, where rules transform play into a structured game. Sportization (as I have used the term) is essentially the process of transforming an activity experienced at the *paidia* end of the continuum to one experienced at the *ludus* end - a process of rationalization.

Surfing is certainly a more ordered activity than the joyfully pointless splashing around in the waves that we see many beach goers indulging in. And yet it can be much less ordered than competitive surfing, where time limits are imposed and maneuvers carried out in order to gain maximum points at a designated part of a designated beach.

Only 19% of surfers surveyed claimed to be involved in competitive surfing[92]. For most surfers, most of the time, surfing is an activity which involves finding good shaped waves, riding them in a way consistent with surfing's various aesthetic conventions, with the aim of having as much fun as possible. By way of contrast, bat and ball play has undergone sportization into various games, such as cricket and tennis. It is rare to see anybody playing with a tennis racquet and ball in a context other than that of a game; either practicing or in competition. It is even difficult to *think* of tennis in any way other than in this context. For most surfers, surfing is not like this, and even for many pro surfers this appears to be the case, as the following extract from my interview with ex-world champion Pam Burridge illustrates:

> The whole idea of competitive surfing is a bit of a joke really because you are trying to box something that shouldn't be if you want to retain any of its purity. ... You just have to accept that this is this game we play so that we can play the other game of living the surfing lifestyle. ... The person who becomes world champion is the best competitive surfer, that's all (Burridge interview 1995).

In an interview with a group of young male competitors, one, a State junior champion, said; "You just surf and competitions come along every now and then" (Young crew interview 1995). I was told by two other junior competitors that they had traveled interstate to a major pro junior

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[92] This excludes 16 respondents who were surveyed while engaged in competition (as part of the study's 'purposive sampling' method). The level of competitive involvement ranges from 33% at one of the most competition oriented sites in the country, to 11% at one of the remote surfing camp sites. Because of the range of sites where the questionnaire was administered, this figure is somewhat biased towards the core surfing population (see Chapter 3).

competition (paid for by their sponsors) but didn't compete because the surf was better at a location a bit further down the coast (Fieldnotes 1995). Even the National Director of *Surfing Australia Inc.*, Alan Atkins, who has 35 years experience in surfing administration, says that "... competition is an extension of your involvement in surfing, not a [thing] in itself" (Atkins interview 1995). These competitively oriented surfers (and others I interviewed) do not approach their surfing as a wholly rationalized athletic sport; for them it is still an activity indulged in to a significant extent for its intrinsic enjoyment[93]. This impression is one which also comes across strongly in surfing books magazines and videos. It is a part of the image which pro surfers are expected to present, but as I have shown, the image and the reality are closely connected through the reflexive and symbiotic relationship between the surfing culture industry (their sponsors) and the broader subculture. The ASP's rejection of the CSI proposal is a clear example of how even pro surfers are unwilling (or unable) to sever the ties between surfing as a sport and the broader subcultural lifestyle.

The relationship between the surfing culture industry, competitive surfing, and soul surfing, contributes enormously to the character of this dialectical conflict. The counter culture/soul surfing ethos has been commodified and promoted by the industry as a purist's ideal, yet at the same time the industry sponsors competitors and their competitions. By promoting both sides the surfing culture industry is contributing to the polarization of the two camps, and at the same time providing a bridge between them. In doing so it is propping up the soul surfing sector - which under normal processes of modernization would have been subsumed by the rational ordering of the sport - and thereby ensuring that any postmodern synthesis is a product of a broad spectrum of the subcultures Apollonian and Dionysian forms.

The dedifferentiation of the amateur/professional dichotomy is a product of the hypercommodification and aestheticization of the surfing subculture (i.e. through the dedifferentiation of work and leisure). The same postmodern processes foster the current dialectic between competitive and soul surfing (mediated through the industry's

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[93] See also Figure K which shows the motivations for surfing of club and non-club members (Chapter 5).

promotional strategies). But, as I have shown previously, the two sides to the conflict are not exclusively located in any sector or social group. The conflict is manifest within individuals just as it is at all levels of surfing's social forms and sectors, and, as discussed in Chapter 4, between the subculture and the parent culture. Ambivalence is the key characteristic of this postmodern dialectic.

***Decentred Leisure and Sacred Play***

Rojek's (1995) thesis on the decentring of leisure exposes the fallacy of the modern privileging of leisure as the site of self-realization. Following Huizinga, he says that if play is the basis for cultural development then "[t]o restrict it to 'the leisure sphere' is to misread its inalienable presence in human life" (Rojek 1995: 186). He claims that modernity presented leisure as a means of utopian escape from the oppressive world of work. But leisure only occasionally delivered on the promise in fleeting moments, and the struggle for this utopia became a trap in itself. Postmodernism recognizes this trap:

> By committing ourselves to decentring leisure we emancipate leisure from the modernist burden of *necessarily* connoting freedom, choice, life-satisfaction and escape with leisure. We recover what the illusions of modernism have concealed (Rojek 1995: 192).

It follows from Rojek that *work* is freed from the burden of necessarily being *devoid* of freedom, choice, life-satisfaction and escape. We can therefore expect that professional sportspeople might experience play in their 'work' activities, as postmodernization facilitates an awakening to the essential play nature of all cultural activity. This appears to be at odds with Huizinga's condemnation of professionalism as stifling the experience of play, but what he was condemning was the *modern differentiated experience*, which denied access to play in work. In postmodernity the social fabric which constructed this dichotomy becomes transparent. We see evidence of this broadcast daily on our television screens in the ecstatic reactions of top professional sportspeople. I suggest that the same potential exists for competitive surfing to be experienced as sacred play.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Huizinga's notion of play as *sub specie ludi* is consistent with Balint (1959) and Freud's (1962) explanations of ecstatic feelings of oneness as tapping into feelings of primal harmony

experienced in infancy. Huizinga (1949: 17) claimed that in play the 'I' finds its 'holiest expression', and as civilization progressed it covered play under 'rank' cultural layers, until in modernity sacred play was all but lost; except in music and dance. Dance, Huizinga (1949: 164) says, is "... the purest and most perfect form of play that exists". The comparison between dancing and surfing is worthwhile pursuing here.

The film *Strictly Ballroom,* a parody on the sport of ballroom dancing, highlights the loss of creativity and play in dance through the process of juridification. Sports dancers are portrayed as stiff and absurd, unable to achieve the heights of ecstatic transcendence because they do not abandon themselves to the dance but consciously attend to technical matters with the aim of achieving an end goal. The contrast the film makes between flamenco and dance sport is the modern dichotomy between art and sport.

Flamenco has a term to describe the state a dancer achieves when they become one with the dance – *duende.* This moment of playing "... in the realm of the beautiful and the sacred" (Huizinga 1949: 19); this experience of flow, of primal harmony, appears to be perfectly understandable in the context of the theories of self transcendence discussed in Chapter 5, but why reject the notion that sport dancing could provide the same experience?

The transcendence of self in sportized activities is of course contingent upon the individual's ability to deal with the extra challenges the juridification and sport aesthetic provide. Following flow theory, the participant must have the skills to match the challenge - both psychological and physical - and embrace the meanings attached to the activity. The meanings are a product of the habitus in which the sport is conducted[94]. Sport dancing is at once an example of hyper-rationalization and a parody of dance; it is an archetypal postmodern activity. The primacy of the aesthetic over the rational order in postmodernity may facilitate transcendence in sport dancing; i.e. by exposing the playful meaning beneath the layers of cultural ordering.

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[94] It is worth recalling the link which, following Kant (1952), we have already established between the ability to experience the sublime and the cultural context (Chapter 6).

The standard explanation for the loss of the spirit of play in competition is inherent in most critiques of modernity - the imposition of rational order distracts the participant from the free flowing nature of the activity; from the aesthetic experience. However it is not rational order in itself which is the culprit, but the imposition of it. The imposition of a new layer of order which is interpreted as detracting from the experience inherent in the activity (as currently defined). For example the joy of ballroom dancing pre sportization may be thought of as inherent in the communion between partners and harmonious movement to music. The addition of competition, formal rules, and audience participation could easily ruin the joy for those immersed in the pre sport aesthetic, but for those who come to ballroom dancing for the first time as a sport the joy is inherent in the sportized aesthetic.

Despite the blurred boundaries between amateur and professional ranks in surfing, Carroll (1995), former world champion surfer, described a loss of enjoyment during the transition from amateur to professional competition:

> It is difficult when you change your reason for surfing. ... Somewhere along the way it becomes work. I found it really a hard transition. ... I felt I was losing the reason why I surfed (Carroll interview 1995).

Carroll had been socialized into surfing as an amateur sport in a club environment. Someone coming from a soul surfing habitus into an amateur competitive scene could be expected to experience similar feelings of alienation. The meanings attached to the activity will block the experience of flow unless they can be embraced by the individual. As Carroll became socialized into the professional scene the thrill returned. He 'hated' being forced to 'train' in poor surfing conditions, but said that in the end he came to enjoy surfing no matter what the surf was like. Carroll stated that turning professional actually increased the thrill of surfing through the higher level at which he was able to perform (Carroll interview 1995; see also Carroll & Wilcox 1994). Carroll's experience is consistent with Elias' (1986: 61-2) claim that while professionalism in sport may reduce the pleasure for the participant, it might also lead to a level of perfection beyond the reach of the amateur.

The internalization of new layers of culture can involve a generational factor; the ushering in of new ideas and the resistance of the old guard.

Certainly there are examples of this in the leisure world. Bunt's (1996) paper on mountain climbing analyses the various conflicts between different aesthetics and rationalizations (see also Devall 1973; Donnelly 1988 & 1993; and Humphreys 1996). Over a century ago the emergence of climbing for leisure was seen by the romantics as defiling the sublime alpine summits. Later an argument emerged over whether guide books detracted from the adventure, and more recently the conflict has centred on the practice of placing permanent bolts in popular climbing cliffs, rather than have the damage caused by hammering in new ones each time the climb is made[95]. As Bunt points out, while there is much current debate over this later practice, no-one these days argues over whether the climb should be made at all, or whether the use of a guidebook is appropriate.

Ice-skating is an activity which has a number of features in common with surfing - speed, risk, dance-like movement, often individualistic - and yet Jackson's (1992) study of elite figure skaters found that they usually only experienced flow in the biggest competitions, and that a contributing factor for failing to experience flow was a lack of audience response. For these skaters the flow experience presumably includes a feeling of oneness with the audience, and the pressure of competition creates the focus needed for total commitment - the challenge to skill ratio - in the same way that large waves act as a catalyst for flow in surfing.

Pearson (1979: 174) suggested that flow could be experienced in the athletic form of surfing, but it was less likely given the increased 'extrinsic factors' which distract from indulgence in the activity for its own sake. All the competitors I interviewed indicated that competition detracted from the spirit of play. Following from the discussion above, the extent to which these participants fail to experience ecstatic moments in competition could be due to the under sportized nature of the activity. If surfing were fully sportized then perhaps the postmodern aestheticization of the sport would allow for play to be experienced in the activity. At the moment, as I have already indicated, the dialectical struggle between the desire to play and to order is characterized by ambivalence at the level of the individual and throughout the subculture's social forms and sectors,

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[95] The current popularity of indoor climbing walls is another development in this direction. See Donnelly (1993) for an examination of these developments.

and any decisive synthesis between the two is problematic, as the following example illustrates.

The exception to the 'no-thrills' competitive experience can occur when the waves are exceptionally well formed and challenging; i.e. sublime. An example of this appeared to occur in the final heat of a contest between two surfers in which the world title lay in the balance for one - Kelly Slater. The waves were very good, large and dangerous. Slater took unusual risks for a contest, attempting extremely difficult and sometimes unsuccessful maneuvers. He was surfing as if it were simply a good opportunity to ride perfect waves in uncrowded conditions. He appeared to be a surfer 'in flow'; pushing his limits rather than simply surfing for points. He was certainly having fun, and at one time offered his opponent a 'high-five' in recognition of a great ride the opponent had just had. Slater - who won - said of the contest:

> I really don't think there is anything else that could top that. ... The surf and everything that happened for me that day was pretty incredible. ... I don't think that from any one contest I'll have that much enjoyment again (*Slater in Kolor* video).

Here the appreciation/experience of the sublime, which underpins all sectors of the subculture, was so overwhelming that the challenges of competitive surfing were either subsumed within the sublime or relegated to insignificance. Not only is this an example of how competitive surfing can retain an attachment to the foundational transcendence of the subculture, but it is also illustrative of the point at which competitive surfing has become alienated from these foundations; i.e. the priority given to the logistical, economic, procedural and other orderings of sportization over the aesthetics of surfing. It is only through the assertion of the aesthetic over the rational order that the experience reaches these depths. In circumstances where competitions are held in conditions which connect with the desire and the sublime at the heart of the surfing aesthetic, the cultural baggage of the competition cannot retain its overwhelming priority.

The question which this raises is whether the cultural layer of sportization can become incorporated into the meaning of surfing in such a way as to retain the experience of flow, or whether it will always be to some extent at least, differentiated; a layer which needs to be overcome in order to

reach the depth of sublime experience? I suggest that while the experience of the sublime in the 'awesome power of nature' remains at the heart of the surfing aesthetic, competition will be a cultural layer which generally stifles the experience of sacred play. Only by tapping into the surfing aesthetic at the level of the sublime (as per the example above) can competitive surfing provide the kind of ecstatic experience - for competitors and surfing spectators alike - that connects with the *conscience collectif* and reinforces the existence of surfing's social forms[96].

The alternative to this is for sportization to involve a severing of ties with the appreciation of the sublime in nature in favour of a new sportized aesthetic. As I have noted elsewhere, the postmodern dedifferentiation of nature and culture allows for the appreciation/experience of the sublime beyond nature (Chapter 6; see also Stranger 1999).

*The State of Play in Surfing*

Maffesoli (1996: 80) points out that dissension and dysfunction can contribute to the maintenance of social groups. It is arguably the case that the conflict between soul surfing and competitive surfing has functioned in such a manner. But the promotion of the soul surfing ethic as part of the surfing culture industry's marketing strategies, and the concurrent successful promotion in the mainstream of surfing as an athletic sport and media spectacle, has led to significant but divergent developments along the lines of the options outlined above;

i) a sportization which retains a connection with the dominant surfing aesthetic; and
ii) a sportization which creates a new aesthetic more consistent with the postmodernization of the dominant sport culture.

The form of sportization which evolved out of engaging mainstream sponsorship often resulted in competitions being held in very poor surf in order to maximize spectators. The problems inherent in this formula - a lack of spectacle and thrills - have been the catalyst for these two different trajectories. The one which retains its connection with the current surfing aesthetic is the result of an internally reflexive process; i.e. it is the result of a dialogue between soul surfing and competitive surfing - an 'internal

[96] Notwithstanding the above, I do not mean to discount the thrill of winning nor the role of competition in the formation of surfing communities. The struggle to win can be experienced vicariously through the media along with the disappointments, fear and elation.

synthesis' - consistent with Lash's (1990: 37-8) oppositional postmodernism. The outcome which severs these ties in favour of a separate aesthetic is the result of a dialogue between competitive surfing and the dominant sports culture - a 'mainstream synthesis' - consistent with Lash's (1990: 37-8) mainstream postmodernism.

*An Internal Synthesis*

Rob Machado, a professional surfer, reflected an attitude often expressed by his colleagues when he complained about poor surf on the pro circuit - "That's not really surfing, its more like a job" (*Billabong Challenge* video). As I have demonstrated earlier, even surfers with an athletic orientation are still motivated to a significant extent by an appreciation/desire for the sublime. A successful synthesis between competitive surfing and soul surfing must accommodate these ambiguities. As Barton Lynch, former world champion, states:

> The key for surfing to succeed as a professional sport is that we need to recreate the dream of what surfing is all about: travelling to remote, exotic places in search of perfect waves (in Green 1995: 54).

Current developments along these lines undertaken by *Quiksilver* and *Billabong* (discussed briefly above) have seen contests held at exotic locations in the most spectacular surf, aimed at a media audience via television sports news coverage (*Quiksilver* only) and video productions. In the future it is envisaged that the *Quiksilver* competitions will be broadcast on pay television (Brooks interview 1995). The result is a synthesis between the aesthetic and the rationalized activity. The video products of these events, which target the surfing audience, depict the competition as peripheral to the aesthetic rewards, which are seen to be valued above the monetary (*Metaphysical* and *Billabong Challenge* videos). This was especially the case with *Quiksilver's* video of the 1995 competition held in a remote jungle region of Indonesia - *Metaphysical: Surfing a Higher Level.* This was a highly aestheticized, choreographed production that only mentioned the competition and its results in the closing credits. The television coverage of the *Quiksilver* event, which targeted the broader sports audience, was broadcast in a standard sports news format.

The 1995 Billabong Challenge involved two weeks camping in the Western Australian desert for eight of the world's best surfers, waiting for

the surf to be just right before holding the contest. The heats were started by waving a 'multi-coloured jacket' from the back of 'George's truck'; no streamers, hoardings or crowds. The contest format involved four contestants in 80 minute heats in which the best four waves for each rider would decide the winner. The time allocated was up to four times longer than standard competition heats and allowed the surfers to 'go for it' and not be conservative; i.e. there was plenty of time to take a few risks and still manage four decent waves if the risks didn't pay off. In this way it was closer to a free/soul surfing session.

The idyllic locations, the quality of the surf, and the relaxed atmosphere of these new aestheticized competitions not only provide the basis for media myth making, but also contribute to a mythical experience for the pro surfers as well. For the surfer spectator the videos connect with the surfing mythology and the images become a resource for the appreciation of the sublime. Both for competitors and (video) spectators, these contests provide an opportunity for renewal of the foundational, cultural, and social transcendence which constitute surfing's social forms. These aestheticized events are the only competitions I have found which are sold as stand-alone videos to the general surfing public. Other competitions appear only to be covered in short segments of predominantly 'free' surfing video productions.

*A Mainstream Synthesis*

Whilst still at a developmental stage, it has been suggested that artificial wave pools are where the future of surfing competition lies. These pools have developed considerably in recent times hosting professional contests in South Africa, Europe, Japan, and even in Texas! This kind of development would seem to be a logical progression of the sportization of surfing; venues could be booked in advance with a guarantee of waves; tickets sold and mainstream media could be guaranteed a standard quality spectacle, starting and finishing on time, and within a budget. Not only would the sport be liberated (alienated) from the vagaries of weather but could be conducted anywhere the facilities were constructed; away from sewerage outflows, unexpected 'monster' waves, sharp rocks and dangerous sea life. Risk can be controlled and largely replaced as a catalyst for flow by the technical and psychological demands of

competition. The incorporation of surfing by the IOC would seem to be further impetus for this kind of development.

The wave pools range in sophistication from outdoor swimming pools with gentle waves less than a metre high, to elaborate indoor complexes, like *Ocean Dome* in Japan. *Ocean Dome* has the world's largest retractable roof, 12,000 square metres of sandy beach and an 'ocean' six times larger than an Olympic pool. It can produce waves up to three and a half metres high (*The Economist* 1993: 84). Depending on the nature of the waves produced, wave pools require different kinds of surfboards, and adjustments to technique for surfing them. A series of competitions have recently been held in a mobile wave pool producing a stationary wave on which skateboarders, snowboarders, wakeboarders, and surfers all compete. The competitions are sponsored by Swatch (a watch company) and the development also provides an avenue for expansion for 'authentic' surfing brands (e.g. '*Quiksilver* - the Boardriding Co.') into this mainstreaming process while retaining a connection with surfing; albeit in simulated form.

A professional circuit involving these pools would create a mainstream simulation of the surfing culture; training in wave pools and gymnasiums with equipment designed to maximize the potential for spectacle on the wave pool product. It is this kind of development which Thrift (1999: 15) believes alienates the actor from the 'immersive practices of contemplation and mysticism' because it no longer involves the anticipation which I have described as inherent in surfing's appreciation of the sublime (Chapter 6). But it is only a simulation relative to the current surfing aesthetic; just as indoor ice skating and football fields rationalized and simulated the original games, which were themselves a rationalization of 'paidic' play (Caillois 1961). In fact even dance, which Huizinga (1949: 164) claimed as the purest form of play, is a rationalization of rhythmic movements less inhibited by 'rank layers' of culture.

Aestheticization helps the process of creating a new athletic sporting aesthetic through the dedifferentiation of social categories - like sport and art, work and leisure, nature and culture - which, in modernity had alienated the spirit of play from all but a few activities which escaped rationalization. It is not that aestheticization promotes a derationalization

but that it uncovers that which modernity had hidden under rational ordering, and in the process the rational becomes aestheticized. In postmodernity the 'truth' which modern rationality was supposed to deliver comes to be seen as contingent, as aesthetically based (Bauman 1992; Rojek 1995; Welsch 1996 & 1997); or following Huizinga (1949), based on play. The social and cultural systems which have been constructed *upon* play and which alienate participants *from* play become transparent, and play is recognized as inherent in these very constructs; "[Civilization] does not come from play like a babe detaching itself *from* the womb: it arises *in* and *as* play, and never leaves it (Huizinga 1949: 173).

The same postmodern conditions which help facilitate self transcendence in risk-taking also promote the experience in wave pool surfing; in particular aestheticization and the dedifferentiation of the modern categories outlined above which expose the possibilities for enjoyment inherent in what Rojek (1995) calls decentred leisure. Bauman (1992: x) describes it as a re-enchantment of the world via the dismantling of the 'modern artifice'. But it is not the dismantling of artifice which is evident here, rather the exposure of its fundamentally aesthetic and contingent nature. And the same 'aestheticization of consciousness' (Welsch 1996) which reveals these qualities in the rational ordering of the parent culture can also expose them within the dominant surfing aesthetic. Hence the link between an appreciation of the sublime in nature and the surfing experience can be seen as an unnecessary cultural construct. The synthesis between the current competitive surfing culture and the mainstream has the same potential to provide meaningful challenges to participants as does the internal synthesis, and therefore the same potential to anchor the sport in the ecstatic experience.

However, wave pool sports threaten to push the limits of the subculture's current *conscience collectif* to breaking point. The link with the appreciation/experience of the sublime in the 'awesome power of nature' cannot be maintained. The kind of interaction at the tribal and band levels which occurs through participation in the bodily practice of surfing could not occur between those wave pool surfing and those ocean surfing. And, given the current differentiation between bodyboard, longboard and shortboard magazines and videos, the inclusion of wave pool surfing in

the existing surfing media would be extremely unlikely. The only means of inclusion within the subculture would appear to be through the surfing bureaucracy and/or the surfing culture industry.

There is something of a precedent for this in the different aesthetics attached to bodyboarding and longboarding; both of which are differentiated from the dominant, shortboarding aesthetic. They represent fragmentation within the subculture which is substantially held together by the surfing culture industry and the surfing bureaucracy.[97] However, at a fundamental level - the appreciation and experience of the sublime - they all share the same *conscience collectif*, and this is reinforced through significant interaction at the tribal and even band level (see Chapter 5). The extent to which the foundational, cultural, and social transcendent elements of the subculture are shared in this way determines the degree of solidarity between these factions. None of these elements are likely to be shared with wave pool surfing.

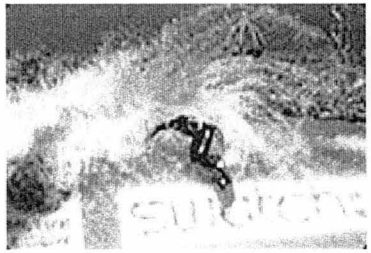
Notwithstanding the above, it is not impossible for *Surfing Australia Inc.* to position itself as a governing body for surfing in the ocean *and* wave pools, since the wave pool format is a logical (postmodern) extension of the current sports aesthetic. In this way the bureaucracy may manage to keep its connection - at least in a purely bureaucratic sense - with the broader surfing subculture through its links with the 'ocean' sport of surfing. A structural segregation within the organization, in line with any cultural split, would be an obvious mechanism for dealing with the problem.

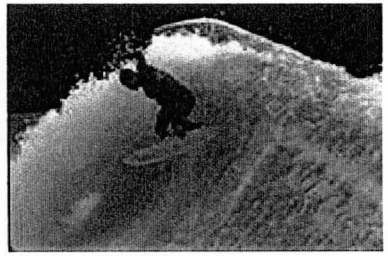
But without significant surfing industry backing inclusion within the subculture is not possible, and any meaningful attempt by industry - especially if it involved the Big 3 - to incorporate wave pool surfing within surfing's symbolic community would be damaging to the subculture's boundaries and the industry's position within the subculture. The corruption of the *conscience collectif* which such a move would involve would constitute an attack on the industry's and the subculture's foundations. A worst-case scenario would see the collapse of the inverted

[97] Longboarding's inclusion within the subculture is clearly less problematic since for many older surfers it represents a progression from shortboarding where they have already established credentials. Bodyboarding is more problematic since it is an entry level activity, and at one extreme bodyboarders reject the surfboard riding culture as being irrelevant.

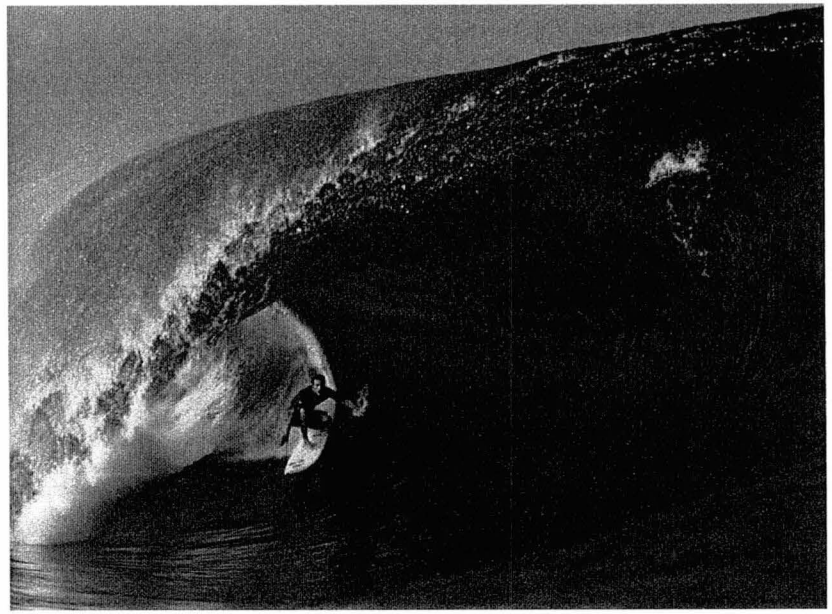
## Plate 15


This is the flyer for the video produced at the *Quiksilver* Pro, 1996. Note that there is no mention of a competition here, or in the video, except at the end in the credits where the results are posted.





These two pictures are from the Swatch mobile wave pool competitions. The rider on the left is identified as a skateboarder and the one on the right a snowboarder (www.swatch.com).



This picture was taken at the Tahiti Pro contest, 1999. It is another media event which takes place remote from spectators (*Australia's Surfing Life*).

pyramid which supports the surfing culture industry (see Fig. N). The symbolic boundaries which the industry had constructed between the subculture and the parent culture would then lose their defining power, and the reflexivity which characterized the relationship between cultural production and the surfing population would contract into mainstream market research within a dedifferentiated market place.

> Value-spheres become hyperdifferentiated, that is, their internal boundaries multiply to the point of fragmentation. ... In other words, hyperdifferentiation produces just that effect of dedifferentiation which Lash (1990) and others see as the mark of postmodernist culture (Crook et al. 1992: 36)

*Complicating factors*

Despite evidence of a split along the lines indicated above, the dialectic is unlikely to be resolved in such a tidy bifurcation of the subculture. Such a scenario places too much emphasis on the symbolic community and neglects the role of the embodied experience in the creation and maintenance of surfing's tribal forms. There are other complicating factors which also affect the speculative outcomes canvassed here; some of which I outline below.

If a split between an internal synthesis and a mainstream synthesis were to occur, competition would be unlikely to disappear from the internally synthesized subculture for the following reasons:

i) The aestheticized events conducted in exotic locations are only an option for elite competitors. If for no other reason, competitions are still likely to continue to be a part of the subcultural scene in order to provide a means of creating this elite.

ii) Competition is an inherent part of surfing activities in significant locations around Australia, and surfers in these areas are not likely to abandon competition, nor leave the beach in favour of wave pools. This may be a generational thing however.

iii) Whilst the vast majority of surfers don't compete, the attitude towards competition is generally one of ambivalence rather than antagonism.

Big events provide a focus that bring surfers together, either physically or virtually through media coverage. Maffesoli (1996: 79) notes that such festivals are an important medium through which a society reinforces the way it feels about itself. And as I pointed out earlier, the conflict over

competitive surfing has been an integral part of the maintenance of the subculture. There appears to be only a small percentage of surfers who would want to see competitions disappear altogether.

Indicative of this is the fact that over 70% of all questionnaire respondents were pleased with surfing being granted probationary Olympic status, and only 5% were opposed. Of that 5% only 2.5% were opposed to competition *per se* (the other 2.5% were concerned about the increase in wave crowding the publicity might bring). The following response from one of the counter culture's prominent figures, Wayne Lynch, is typical of the reaction I encountered:

> While I don't like to see surfing exploited and marketed I don't mind seeing it being recognized - so I think it's a good thing that it has been recognized as an Olympic sport. Its difficult and unique and this recognition will enable the sport to mature (Lynch interview 1995)

Another important complicating factor is the mainstream media's increasing interest in extreme sports, like big wave surfing. The postmodernization of the mainstream - of which the dialectic between the surfing subculture and the parent culture is a function - has resulted in a demand for the kind of spectacle surfers perceive as sublime. Although the mainstream audiences are unlikely to be reading these images in quite the same way, an appreciation of the power of nature and the thrill of engaging with it is probably closer to the mark than the message of 'man conquers nature' which, until recently, has been an inevitable part of any mainstream sports coverage of comparable activities. Unless the wave pool promoters can provide a very high level of excitement for spectators a professional wave pool circuit will not survive. Similar postmodern sportizations have occurred, and provide models of success and failure in this arena; e.g. indoor motor cross racing, and wind surfing races in Olympic pools with giant fans.

*Section Summary*

The hypercommodification and aestheticization of the surfing subculture, in line with the broader postmodern dedifferentiation of work and leisure, has seen the typically modern dichotomy between amateurism and professionalism become irrelevant. Through the aesthetic reflexivity of the subculture the focus of the conflict has shifted to a broader dialectic

between soul surfing and competitive surfing. I have defined it as a dialectic rather than a dichotomy because the conflict is clearly one in which synthesis of some kind is indicated.

An examination of two distinct trends in surfing competition suggests that the dialectic has become manifest in two arenas:

i) a mainstream postmodern form - a synthesis between the competitive surfing and mainstream sport; and

ii) an oppositional postmodern form - driven by the reflexivity inherent in the relationship between the surfing culture industry and the general surfing population.

In Habermas' (1987) terms the mainstream synthesis could be seen as a product of colonization, and the internal synthesis a product of communicative action. But this is somewhat of a distortion. While Habermas' model has been useful as a means of organizing a study of the relationships between sectors of the parent culture and subculture, the process itself emphasized its limits. As with the associated cultural studies categories of *incorporation* and *resistance*, this analysis does not take into account hypercommodification and aestheticization, and their dedifferentiating effects. The colonization thesis is based upon differentiated systems (bureaucratic and economic), which it recognizes in modernity as becoming all pervasive and alienating, but which in postmodernity dedifferentiate (Crook et al. 1992). The dedifferentiation and aestheticization of modern systems inherent in what Lash & Urry (1994) describe as 'disorganized capitalism' contribute to a situation in which colonization in the postmodern context could just as easily be interpreted as liberation; i.e. freedom from the constraints of the counter cultural aesthetic and the opportunity to forge a new sporting aesthetic in tune with the broader (mainstream) postmodern aestheticization of sport.

The oppositional and mainstream postmodern forms are different trajectories; neither one nor the other should be interpreted as distinct sites of resistance or incorporation. In the context of a postmodernizing parent culture, both these forces are inherent in both the two syntheses.

## Conclusion

In the previous chapter I discussed the way in which the surfing culture industry had constructed boundaries between the subculture and the parent culture. In this chapter I have outlined the way in which the process of sportization has worked towards a deconstruction of these boundaries. The umbrella organization which promotes the process, *Surfing Australia Inc.* , aims to bring the sport of surfing to maturity through an integration with the dominant sports culture. In striving for mainstream sponsorships and government funding it has opened up the competitive surfing arena to increasing levels of juridification, bureaucratization and commodification from outside the subculture. However, any link between surfing's oppositional form of postmodernism and the surfing culture industry on the one hand, and the subculture's mainstream form and surfing's sporting bureaucracy on the other, cannot be sustained. The industry's involvement in sportization and the ASP's (Association of Surfing Professionals) ratification and support for industry developments in alternative competition forms demonstrates the complexity of this dialectical process. Both the industry and the sporting bodies currently retain their connection with the foundational experience and are grounded in the subculture's neo-tribalism.

However there is a potential for a fragmentation of the subculture inherent in the emerging phenomenon of wave pool competitions which leaves the subculture open to integration within the mainstream. But since incorporation has consistently been a two-way process involving the postmodernization (dedifferentiation, aestheticization, fragmentation) of the parent culture, such a scenario is clearly problematic; i.e. any integration of surfing culture is at once a process of disintegration of the modern mainstream.

Further, any split in surfing subculture is unlikely to result in its disintegration into free floating cultural fragments detached from embodied experience. At least in its oppositional form, the surfing subculture has not been deconstructed by postmodernization, rather it has been nurtured by it. While the mainstream form can be interpreted as a move towards incorporation within a depthless mass culture, Welsch (1997: 24) reminds us that this process is merely a surface manifestation of a more 'deep-seated aestheticization', which reveals play as inherent in the

very ordering processes of sportization. This postmodern aestheticization indicates a synthesis between play and order rather than stifling rationalization, and so I suggest that any rupture of surfing's symbolic community along the lines of differentiated bodily practice will result in subgroups replicating the neo-tribal structure of the parent body, grounded in foundational, cultural and social transcendence (see Fig K). Following DiMaggio and Powell (1983) this might be considered an 'ecstatic' isomorphic process[98].

Although not theorized in this manner, climbing (Donnelly 1993) and snowboarding (Humphreys 1996) provide evidence of this kind of tribal replication in response to the same postmodern imperatives. The implications of this model will be discussed further in the concluding chapter.

[98] DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) typology of isomorphism recognized three forms - coercive, mimetic, and normative - none of which reflect the aesthetic nature and affectual solidarity which characterizes surfing subculture.

# CHAPTER 9
# CONCLUSION

The thesis set out to discover what significance surfing's risk-taking orientation has for the experience of self, identity and community, in the context of a hypercommodified subculture subject to strong imperatives towards bureaucratization. The research focussed on testing my hypothesis that there is a link between risk-taking and group identity which is particularly apposite to postmodernity, and that the surfing culture industry and competitive surfing may be integral to this dynamic.

The study addresses a need for ethnographic data to inform current theoretical debates in the area of contemporary social and cultural change; in particular those theories which cover the nature of the self and social formations in postmodernity, and the infiltration of this lifeworld by the economy and the rule of law (commodification and bureaucratization). The study also fills a gap in the sociological understanding of one of Australia's most significant subcultures.

The thesis structure broadly follows a hermeneutic approach. While each chapter has a particular emphasis, each also addresses the relationship between micro and macro within an historical context, informed by a number of dialectical relationships. The consistent analytic focus upon the self, social forms, and the subculture and its relationship with the mainstream, was informed by these specific dialectical conflicts which come under the universal umbrella of *aestheticization* versus *rationalization*.

The historical context in which the current surfing subculture developed was first discussed before exploring the structural character of the contemporary subculture and its various subgroups and tensions. The risk-taking orientation and the embodied experience of surfing was then addressed, and a model establishing a fundamental link between this experience, the surfing aesthetic, and surfing's social forms was developed. The surfing culture industry and sportization were then examined in light of this analysis in order to gain an understanding of the dynamic at play between these structures and individual surfers, their local communities, and the subculture in general.

The thesis concludes that postmodernity provides an environment in which the self can become anchored in the shared transcendent experience of bodily practice, which forms the basis of stable social formations. Through an interaction with the sublime in nature which risk-taking can provide, the self 'experiences itself' in communion with the world. This transcendence is both a loss of self and an expanded sense of self, whereby subject and object merge in ecstatic experience. The shared knowledge of ecstatic experience constitutes a *conscience collectif* which underpins the subculture's social formations at the local and global levels. These neo-tribal formations reinforce the ecstatic experience through their hypercommodified culture and their sociality. Their structure promotes the hyperindividualistic pursuit of ecstatic experience and constitutes a self-perpetuating social configuration whereby their reflexive communities are constantly reconstructed through bodily practice. The bodily experience and its meaning is mediated on a global scale, not only through the surfing media, but through the symbolic tokens (produced by the surfing industry) which remain linked to the signified foundational experience. Fostered by the surfing industry, competitive surfing has evolved (at least in one direction) towards a form which maintains and reinforces its link with sublime experience.

## Theoretical Implications

The distinction I made between the surfing subculture as postmodern and the parent culture as being in the process of postmodernization proved to be a valuable strategy. It was an analytic tool that utilized the concepts of *resistance* and *incorporation* to provide insights into the complexity of the dialectical relationship; in particular the process of resistance *via* incorporation and the role of the subculture as an agent of postmodernization.

The increasing interest in risk-taking leisure activities has been explained in terms of aestheticization and the breakdown of the social in the postmodern(izing) environment. The thesis shows that a retreat into embodied experience in search of the 'real' need not be interpreted as a symptom of a narcissistic or depthless self. Rather it can be an adaptation to the apparently random and rapidly changing postmodern surface,

providing an alternative to the collapsed superstructure and dedifferentiated economic base of modernity; a postmodern *sub*structure beneath its commodified *surface*. The notion of a substructure reflects the fact that these neo-tribal configurations are grounded in an experience of union which creates and supports this commodified surface, rather than a superstructure build upon its economic base.

The illusion of 'depth' which modernity provided the self was constituted by the social and cultural layers under which it was buried and through which an identity was established. A common interpretation of the collapse of these layers (base and superstructure) sees the self left with a flat surface upon which to construct identity(s) from the fragmented and free-floating 'signs without signifieds' of a deconstructed modernity. The process can be one of panic or play, but either way it is not necessarily as disorganized, nor as fragile a product, as is commonly portrayed. As this study of surfing has demonstrated, the symbolic tokens are not necessarily alienated from any substantive signified. They can be attached to bodily practices which extend unambiguous meaning to the symbols, at least for those involved in the practices. This anchorage is contingent upon the existence of social formations which emanate from the sharing of the experience and which give meaning and value to the experience and promote the bodily practices which facilitate it, through social interaction and the activities of the surfing culture industry.

While the importance of the body and 'lived experience' has been recognized as fundamental to the formation of social groups in postmodernity, the communities they form are depicted as fleeting, existing only while the activity is being shared and dispersing as soon as the activity ceases (e.g. Bauman 1992; Maffesoli 1996). In fact Rojek (1995: 8) says that "[t]hose who devote themselves fanatically to a single leisure pursuit will be dismissed as stranded representatives of retro-culture". The above approach portrays the body as a 'play station' with game-boy and game-girl insatiably consuming each new distraction churned out by the culture industry. The model is one in which alienated individuals constantly find themselves adrift in a void between fleeting and indeterminable moments of self affirming experience and sociality. The problem is said to be compounded by the hypercommodification and simulation of experience and lifestyles imposed from 'above'.

> Faced with a multitude of expanding leisure options the individual feels permanently cut off from pleasure and excitement. ... The meaninglessness and emptiness of leisure activity will become oppressively self-evident (Rojek 1995: 8).

The neo-tribes and imagined communities present a scenario not that far removed from MacCannell's (1992: 187) dystopian image in which he describes the postmodern condition as involving "... schizophrenia at the level of culture, and a general ennui periodically interrupted by euphoric release from all constraints".

Contrary to the above model, surfing provides an example of a subculture based on bodily practices that are challenging and exciting. The periodical nature of 'euphoric release' combined with the intensity of the experience engenders a desire and commitment from practitioners rather than a detached despair. The surfing aesthetic, mediated through the surfing culture industry, sustains the individual between 'real' episodes through a mimetic appreciation of the sublime in images of surf and surfing, and through symbolic tokens anchored in the shared experience, all of which feed the surfer's desire for sublime experience. The sociality of the group further reinforces this aesthetic and desire. This self-perpetuating configuration sustains the sociality of surfing's social forms and resists the rational trajectory towards *gesellschaft* and subsumption by the ordering processes of sportization.

Rather than some kind of residual modern stronghold resisting the tide of postmodernization, the surfing subculture has been shown to be a product and an agent of postmodernization. Generally the subculture fits what Lash (1990: 37-8) categorized as 'oppositional postmodernism' - which fosters collective identity and community governance - as opposed to 'mainstream postmodernism' - which relates to market governance. Kumar (1995: 193) says that postmodernism of the oppositional kind stands against the 'currents of capitalist culture', something which appears paradoxical given the level of commodification inherent in the subculture.

Crucial to unraveling this paradox is an understanding of the way in which the surfing culture industry acts as an agent of resistance to colonization from mainstream capitalism in the very process of commodifying every aspect of the subculture. Giddens (1991: 200) said that commodification is "... a driving force towards the emergence of

internally referential systems". In the case of surfing the level of commodification and the industry's position as an integral part of the subculture means that the economic 'system' cannot be differentiated from the subculture as a whole. The subculture's reflexivity sees the industry enmeshed in the social forms of surfing through a corporate culture that gives primacy to the bodily practice and the sublime experience, both rhetorically and in reality. The 'internal referentiality' which Giddens speaks of is manifest as a reflexivity which helps ensure the integrity and resilience of the subculture at the local and global level.

The current indications are that the sportization of surfing is diverging into two distinct trajectories, along the lines of oppositional and mainstream postmodern modes. But I suggest that it would be a mistake to associate the mainstream form too readily with the fragmentation and depthlessness of postmodernity's darker side. To do so would be to risk missing the adaptive responses emerging in this hyperreal habitus.

While the need to remain open to the complexity and unpredictability of postmodernity in our deliberations is widely recognized, I suggest that we fail in this regard if our interpretations of the postmodern condition come from a modernist perspective; fixated upon the decay of the modern. Focussing on the ways in which the modern structure is collapsing predisposes us towards interpreting micro level responses as pathological rather than creative or adaptive, and we are less likely to recognize the ways in which the social is refashioning itself. While preoccupied with the search for a new superstructure to replace the old - or reporting on the unlikelihood of one given the end of the social - we fail to recognize the substructure which the stripping away of the modern artifice has made possible. For example, the chase for thrills in risk-taking is seen as symptomatic of the 'speed', 'contingency' 'disorganization' 'disembeddedness' of postmodernization (which it surely is), but by stepping outside the modern paradigm we discover that risk-taking provides a depth of self arguably more profound than that which modernity allowed; a self anchored in the ecstatic experience of communion with nature and fellow risk-takers. Not only is the desire for embodied experience and communion with nature a 'symptom' of modernity's collapse, but at the same time it is an adaptive response and an indication of the ecstatic nature of an emerging postmodernity.

## Implications Beyond the Subculture

The model I have presented offers an alternative to the 'panic for the real' by alienated and schizophrenic selves on the one hand, and playful but equally transient sociality on the other. Surfing provides an example of how a dedication to exciting bodily practice can provide an anchor for the self and a basis upon which stable social formations and identities can develop. There are many subcultures based around similar activities, such as snowboarding, hang gliding, climbing, skateboarding, parachuting, and motorcycle riding. While none of them have been studied in quite the same way as I have done here, there is ample evidence of their similarity with surfing subculture, and they provide an opportunity for a comparison of the ways in which they have adapted to the dialectical conflicts of postmodernization.

The thesis also has implications beyond the field of sport and leisure - which is perhaps not surprising given the postmodern dedifferentiation of these modern categories; for example it can provide insights into areas as diverse as road safety, crime, education, work, risk management, religion, and organizational theory. It supports the need to take account of the aesthetic in our analysis of everyday life. I have shown how postmodernity provides an environment conducive to sublime experience beyond risk-taking; in mundane or more sedentary activities, like gardening, bird watching, reading, driving, shopping, listening to music, cooking. Following this the postmodern environment is one which supports the development of community based upon the shared experience of the sublime in these often hyperindividualistic practices. The 'tragic sociality' observed as inherent in the postmodern condition may well involve more than we suspect. Feelings of communion with others may form the basis for a fellowship which transcends the many differences between individuals and the many subcultures that appear to colour the postmodern surface. In other words, with the collapse of the modern superstructure, the rediscovery of ecstatic community - what Maffesoli (1996) calls a 'communion of saints' - hidden beneath the cultural and social layers of modernity, may well characterize a postmodern alternative. Aestheticization dismantles the modern artifice exposing our interconnectedness through ecstatic experience rather than cognitive rationalization. Anderson (1996: 215) argues that postmodernity "... is an attempt to map out a much larger landscape of the mind, and to

locate a deeper commonality", and while surfing subculture is far from a utopian social form, it does provide some insights into just how this might be achieved. As Toffler (1970: 263) said some time ago, "The surfing subcult is a signpost pointing to the future".

**Main Contributions of the Thesis:**

i) A national study of the surfing subculture in Australia.

ii) A case study of the dialectic between a postmodern subculture and its postmodernizing parent culture.

iii) An understanding of risk-taking and its relationship to the experience of the self, identity and forms of sociation in postmodernity.

iv) An understanding of the role of the media in the development and maintanence of a risk-taking aesthetic.

v) A study of the processes of commodification and bureaucratization and their connection with the experience of self and society in a postmodern(izing) environment.

vi) Ethnographic data to inform theoretical debates about current social and cultural change.

## Glossary of Surfing Terms

| | |
|---|---|
| Barrel | A wave that pitches ahead of itself when it breaks, creating a hollow cylindrical shape. Surfing inside the barrel is considered by most surfers to be the 'ultimate' surfing experience. |
| Break | A break is a particular place to surf all given names by the local surfers. There are also kinds of breaks, such as reef breaks, where waves break over submerged rocks or coral; point breaks, where waves break down the side of headlands and other lands which jut out into the sea; and river mouths, where waves break over sand etc. swept out to the sea by the constant flow of water. |
| Close out | A wave that breaks all at once, leaving no unbroken wave face on which the surfer can ride. |
| Curl | The point where the breaking part of a wave meets the unbroken face - the most powerful part of the wave. |
| Hollow | The hollowness of a wave is a measure of how round the 'barrel' (above) created when it breaks. |
| Off-shore | This term refers to the direction of the wind. An off-shore wind blows from land to sea. It evens out the shape of the wave, creating a smooth 'wall' (below) on which to ride and promotes 'hollowness' (above). On-shore winds ruin the quality of waves. |
| Pipeline | A powerful surf spot in Hawaii where the surf breaks on a shallow reef and creates very hollow tube shaped waves. |
| Set | Set waves are the big waves. A swell will typically produce groups of two or more set waves every so often. The time between sets differs as does the number of waves in it. Surfers seen sitting beyond the breaking waves staring out to see are waiting for the next set. |
| Shore break | This is when a wave, usually a 'close out' (see above), crashes directly onto the shore. |
| Stoked | Originally it described the ecstatic reaction to a surfing session or a particular ride. Today it is also used more loosely to describe a general state of positive excitement. |
| Tube | See 'barrel' above. |
| Tube ride | Riding inside the tube; under the curl of the wave. |

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## Appendix 1

### Location Survey - Base Locations and their Characteristics[99]

| Base | Characteristics |
|---|---|
| Torquay (Victoria)<br>u,cc,ac,mca,ms,hr,ns,c,m | Important surfing industry location; Bells Beach contest - the richest on the professional circuit. |
| North Narrabeen (Sydney NSW)<br>u,cc,ac,mca,ms,hr,c,d | High density urban location; club and contest oriented culture; close to surfing industry. |
| Lennox Head (NSW)<br>co,cc,ac,mca,ms,hr,ns,l,w,m | Regional site; tourism, fishing and agriculture economy; counter culture location - especially in the 1970s. |
| Mooloolaba (Queensland)<br>u,ac,ms,ns,b,l,w,d | High density tourism; large surfing population; surfing a mainstream activity. |
| Darwin (Northern Territory)<br>u,ns,w,s | Isolated surfing population; surf only occurs in Darwin as a result of cyclones so dedicated surfers travel to nearby islands like Bali. |
| Red Bluff (Western Australia)<br>r,cc,ms,hr,w,s | Desert surf camps; spartan conditions; dangerous surf sites; dedicated and experienced surfers. |

[99] Western Australia appears to be over represented but this is misleading. The size and the sparsely populated nature of the State meant that each location provided access to a limited range of sites, whereas in the other States each location provided access to a wider range within a reasonable traveling distance. From Mooloolaba, for example, I visited sites from Noosa Heads to Coolangatta. Appart from isolated pockets, this is virtually the entire surfable coastline of Queensland.

| | |
|---|---|
| Kalbarri (Western Australia)<br>co,cc,ms,hr,ns,w,s | Small fishing and tourism town; dangerous surf; local surfers have a reputation for aggressive behaviour towards surfers from out of town. |
| Geraldton (Western Australia)<br>co,mca,ms,hr,ns,w,m | Large regional centre; agriculture, fishing, tourism and shipping. |
| Perth (Western Australia)<br>u,ac,mca,ms,ns,b,w,d | Urban location; problems of overcrowding and aggression in often poor surf. |
| Margaret River (Western Australia)<br>co,cc,ac,ms,hr,ns,b,c,m | Regional location; surfing tourism (from Perth mainly) plays an important part in the areas economy; big wave surfing area. |
| Albany (Western Australia)<br>co,cc,mshr,ns,c,s | Regional location; local surfers in the area have a reputation for aggressive behaviour towards surfers from out of town. |
| Cactus (South Australia)<br>r,cc,ms,hr,w,s | Desert surf camp; spartan conditions; dangerous shark population; a small, permanent surfing population with a reputation for aggressive behaviour towards outsiders. |
| Pondalowie (South Australia)<br>co,hr,ns,w,s | National Park campsite; shared with families and other holiday makers; a number of novice surfers on holiday with their parents. |
| Adelaide (South Australia)<br>u,mca,ms,ns,w,d | Urban location; good surf only available out of town; surfing industry site. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Hobart (Tasmania)<br>u,cc,ac,ms,hr,ns,b,c,m | Rural and semi rural sites out of the city; studied during the cold winter; no 'beach scene' at this time of year except around fires; usually only surfers on the beaches. |

**CODE for Appendix 1**

u - urban; co - country; r - remote; cc - counter culture; ac - athletic culture; mca - manufacturing (clothing & accessories); ms - manufacturing (surfboards); hr - high risk sites; ns - novice sites; b - bodyboard sites; l - longboard sites; c - cool climate; w - warm climate; d - dense surfing population; m - medium density surfing population; s - sparse surfing population.

## Appendix 2

### Intensive Interviews: Interviewees and their Characteristics

| Interviewee | Characteristics[100] |
|---|---|
| Alan Atkins<br>m,5,u,mca,c,s,sa,cc,g,l | Male, 46-55 yrs; surf industry town; competitor; Executive Director of *Surfing Australia Inc.* - the governing body for the 'sport' of surfing. |
| Gail Austen<br>f,5,u,ret,mca,ms,c,sa,cc,g | Female, 46-55yrs; urban location; ex-competitor; founder of the *Australian Women's Surfing Association;* surf shop proprietor. |
| Tim Baker<br>m,3,u,mca,ms,ma,g | Male, 26-35yrs; urban location; past editor of surfing magazines; past editing director of a surfing magazine publishing company; freelance surf media journalist. |
| Bill*<br>m,4,u,ret,mca,ms,ma,c,s,cc,g,b,l | Male, 36-45yrs; surf industry town; surf magazine editor and publisher. |
| Blue*<br>f,2,r,n,cc,g,b | Female, less than 26; desert location; long term resident of desert camp; bodyboarder; daughter of surfboard shaper. |
| Jack Boast<br>m,6,u,c,sa,g,l | Male, over 55 yrs; urban location; sport surfing administrator; retired Air Commodore; competitor; longboard and shortboard rider. |

[100] Unless stated otherwise, the interviewees are predominantly or exclusively shortboard riders.

| | |
|---|---|
| Rod Brooks<br>m,5,u,c,s,sa,g | Male, 46-55yrs; surf industry town; competitor; President of *Surfing Australia Inc.*; board member of *International Surfing Association*; President of *Quiksilver International (Australia).* |
| Greg Brown<br>m,3,u,ret,mca,ms,c,cc | Male, 26-35yrs; surf industry town; surfboard shaper; big wave specialist; partner in an internationally distributed surf clothing label and surf shop. |
| Pam Burridge<br>f,3,co,ma,v,c,s,sa,cc,g | Female, 26-35yrs; country location; professional surfer; former world champion; veteran of the professional circuit; advocate for women in professional surfing. |
| Tom Carroll<br>m,3,u,c,s,cc | Male, 26-35yrs; urban location; professional surfer; twice world champion; industry insider; surf film producer/director. |
| Don*<br>m,3,co,n,cc | Male, 26-35yrs; country location; prominent local at Kalbarri. |
| Eddy*<br>m,4,u,c,sa,l | Male, 36-45yrs; urban location; longboard competitor; former State shortboard champion x 3; Director of Coaching for Sunshine Coast; national longboard representative for *Surfing Australia Inc.*. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Eric*<br>m,4,u,mca,ma,c,s,cc,g | Male, 36-45yrs; surf industry town; ex-competitor; Big 3 company executive; former surf magazine editor. |
| Midget Farrelly<br>m,5,u,ma,v,c,cc,g,l | Male, 46-55yrs; urban location; competitor; former world champion 1964; longboarder; surfboard manufacturer. |
| Jack Findlay<br>m,5,u,ret,mca,ma,v,c,s,sa,cc | Male, 46-55yrs; surf industry town; ex surf journalist; author; Coordinator of *Surfworld Australia* (an interactive surfing museum). |
| Greg*<br>m,5,u,ms,c,s,cc,l | Male, 46-55yrs; urban location; pioneer surfer; former State champion 1960s; ex- surfboard rider. |
| Len*<br>m,4,u,mca,s,cc | Male, 36-45yrs; surf industry town; graphic designer/artist; surf clothing industry insider. |
| Wayne Lynch<br>m,4,u,mca,c,s,cc,g | Male, 36-45yrs; country location; ex junior world champion; prominent counter culture figure; ex competitor; surfboard shaper; promoter of indigenous surfing. |
| Nick*<br>m,5,u,c,s,cc,l | Male, 46-55yrs; country location; pioneer surfer. |
| Peter*<br>m,4,r,n,cc,g | Male, 36-45yrs; desert location; 14 years as caretaker of desert surf camp. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Red*<br>m,3,r,n,cc | Male, 26-35 yrs; desert location; long term resident at desert camp. |
| Reg*<br>m,4,u,mca,s,cc | Male, 36-45yrs; surf industry town; graphic designer/artist; surf clothing industry insider. |
| Steve Reid<br>m,4,u,c,sa,cc,g | Male, 36-45yrs; urban location; competitor; President of North Narrabeen Boardriders Club; Teams Manager of Surf League (national surfing competition). |
| Ron*<br>m,4,r,n,cc | Male, 36-45yrs; desert location; regular desert camp visitor; novelist; classical pianist. |
| Tom* and Jerry*<br>m m<br>5 3<br>r r<br>n n<br>cc cc | Males, 46-55yrs and 26-35yrs; desert location; annual visitors to desert camp since 1970. |
| Lindsay Thompson<br>m,5,co,ret,ms,c,s,sa,cc,b,l | Male, 46-55yrs; country location; longboard and shortboard competitor; club member; surf shop proprietor; surfboard shaper; competition promoter; member of shire council surfing policy committee; ex state coach; ex state team manager; ex state *Surfing Australia Inc.* Vice President, and contest director for 4 years. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Young crew*<br>M1 M2 M3<br>2 2 2<br>u u u<br>mca - -<br>c - -<br>s - -<br>- - n<br>cc cc cc<br>b b b | Males, less than 26 yrs; surf industry town; M1 - ex- Victorian junior champion and sponsored and employed by Rip Curl; M2 and M3 - keen novice surfers. |
| Nat Young<br>m,5,co,mca,c,s,cc,l | Male, 46-55yrs; country location; ex world champion - shortboard and longboard; ex counter culture figure; author; film maker; publisher; surf fashion industry insider. |

**CODE for Appendix 2**

m - male; f - female; 2 - aged 16-25 yrs; 3 - 26-35yrs; 4 - 36-45yrs; 5 - 46-55yrs; 6 - >55yrs; u - urban; co - country; r - remote; ret - retail; mca - manufacturing (clothing & accessories); ms - manufacturing (surfboards); c - competition; s - sponsorship; sa - sports administration; n - no connection with previous sectors; cc - counter culture; g - gender issues; b - bodyboarding; l - longboarding.

## APPENDIX 3

### DEFINITION OF CATEGORIES FOR TABLES - Figures: E, F & G.

**General**

The following distinctions between urban, country and remote areas do not follow any accepted definition. The reason for this is that none of the definitions I found proved adequate for the purpose I had in mind, and so I have devised my own categories to suit the study.

The purpose of these categories is to distinguish between the different surfing lifestyles rather than demographics. While the Australian Bureau of Statistics would distinguish between Brisbane and Mooloolaba, for example, I have not, because the Mooloolaba area is one of the most popular surfing locations for Brisbane surfers, and many surfers who live in the area commute to Brisbane daily for work.

***Urban*** – For the purposes of this study 'urban' includes capital cities and areas outside them which share to some extent in the life of those cities; i.e. as places from which significant numbers of city workers commute daily and which city dwellers use as weekend and recreational sites. e.g. Melbourne and Torquay, Brisbane and Mooloolaba.

***Country*** – This category includes all those cities, towns and bounded areas remote from the daily interaction with the capital cities and their urban area of influence. The population and density of these areas varies from quite large regional cities (like Geraldton) to small farming communities and fishing villages (like Kalbarri).

***Remote*** – This category covers isolated surfing communities which exist in remote areas, without the amenities of power, water, sewerage etc.. They consist of a combination of permanent, and long and short term traveling surfers.

**Figure E**

*Counter culture* – This category covers a range of alternative/oppositional lifestyle orientations (e.g. nomadic; feral; desert dwelling; neo-hippy; anti-establishment hedonism; voluntary unemployment; heavy drug use).

*Athletic Culture* – This category covers those areas with a recognizable orientation towards competitive surfing. The kind of athletic approach which we find in swimming for example is still extremely rare in surfing and this category covers those for whom going surfing is regularly approached as a training session for competition.

The athletic and counter culture categories are not mutually exclusive. Serious competitors can still be immersed in a counter culture lifestyle and enjoy 'free' surfing sessions. Both categories are often evident in any one location; sometimes focused in different sites.

*Manufacturers (Clothing & Accessories)* – This category covers the surf fashion industry, wetsuits, and other accessories (a multi billion dollar concern).

*Manufacturers (Surfboards)* – This category is important in that it covers the main product essential to a surfing lifestyle and which is not marketed to the mainstream – except to the novice surfer. The extent to which surfboard manufacturers exist outside concentrated industry sites as 'cottage' industries supplying their local surfing populations is a significant feature of the culture.

*Cool or Warm Climate* – These categories are based upon subjective assessments regarding the climate at the time of my study. The differentiation is based on whether the wearing of a wetsuit was optional for surfers; If they were always worn it was cool, if not it was warm. The reason for this category was to differentiate between locations where participation in surfing might be considered favourably influenced by the climate and those locations where the climate might be considered a deterrent.

*High Risk Sites* – This category includes those locations where surfing conditions occurred during my study that posed a threat of injury to

experienced surfers beyond the normal risks which they face in any surfing session (e.g. being hit by their surfboard). These risks were posed by a combination of wave size, power and shape; bottom conditions and depth; dangerous sea conditions. These sites ensured access to experienced surfers and provided an opportunity for participation in risk-taking.

*Novice Sites* – These were sites where the conditions were reasonably safe for people learning to surf. Some of these sites were recognized by the general community as usually providing that level of safety, while the safety of other sites simply depended on the size of the swell. Novice sites were important in order to gain access to novice surfers and to observe the way in which the general population played at surfing – usually with bodyboards. The sites also provided a means of observing the way in which novice surfers – especially the young – attempted to differentiate themselves from the other mainstream beach users.

*Bodyboarding and Longboarding Sites* – These sites not only provided access to surfers who used these particular surfcraft, but also provided insights into the different cultural, attitudinal and behavioral features of the subgroups as they were manifest in isolation from – and to some extent in opposition to - the dominant (shortboard) culture.

*Surfing Population Density* – The categories under this heading were determined on the basis of my experience during the period of study. The density of the population depends upon the number of surfers in the area, the frequency at which they surfed, the number of sites available in the area to accommodate these numbers and the frequency of waves at these sites. A location with a 'dense' surfing population is one where I experienced most sites regularly having fifteen or more surfers maneuvering with each other to share waves at one spot where they were breaking. These locations would not have sites with reasonable waves without surfers out riding them. A 'moderately dense' location is one which regularly had some sites with less than six surfers maneuvering for waves and sites with reasonable waves could sometimes be found without surfers riding them. Locations with sparse populations were those where I rarely found more than 6 surfers maneuvering for waves and where sites

with reasonable waves could regularly be found without surfers riding them.

The density can be of significance in the levels of aggression and the dynamics of social configurations.

**Figure F**
**Areas of Expertise**
Each person interviewed had expertise in more than one area. This expertise varied in type, but all were based on direct experience of some kind. For example, amongst those with expertise in the specific category of competition were professional and amateur surfers, promoters, sports administrators, journalists and anti competition campaigners.

Shortboards were not included in the table because all *locations* were dominated by shortboarding. The kneeboarding and wave ski populations were too small to be taken into consideration.

***Manufacturing (Clothing and Accessories)*** includes the manufacture of wetsuits.

***No Connection with Previous Sectors*** is significant in that these interviewees were surfers with no commercial interest in surfing. Their surfing lifestyles were exclusively based on the activity of surfing, and to various degrees the social and cultural aspects of the surfing scene.

***Counter culture*** includes those with experience of the counter culture scene either from an historical perspective or from their current lifestyle. I argue that elements of the counter culture remain evident in the lifestyles of many if not most surfers but for the purposes of this study the category refers to unambiguous alternative lifestyles, such as desert dwellers, neo-hippies and itinerants, and other oppositional lifestyles.

***Women's Issues*** - Expertise in this area ranges from historical perspectives (e.g. numbers of women surfers), the women's contests, sponsorship, media coverage, sexism and discrimination. The expertise of men refers to historical and statistical data, and bureaucratic and commercial policy and practice in relation to women in surfing.

**Figure G**

*Age*

Data has been collected on the specific age and the purposive sampling targeted the widest range. Age has been divided into two categories here for convenience. This division follows the marketing strategies of the media.

*Experience*

The following categorization is a rough approximation. It will vary not only depending upon each individual's physical abilities and access to the beach, but also the frequency and quality of surf available in each location.

Surfboard riders with less than 3 years experience are considered still yet to master basic competencies in a range of surfing conditions. Those with 3 to 10 years experience are considered well acculturated and competent surfers in most surfing conditions. The most significant feature about those with 10 years experience or more is their substantial background in the subculture.

Bodyboarding requires much less time to master and 3 years experience is long enough for a dedicated surfer to become quite proficient.

*Surfcraft*

The kind of craft *mainly* used by the respondent has been recorded in this table. I also have data on whether an individual 'sometimes' or 'never' used other craft. The 'Shortboard' category refers to the most commonly used high performance surfboards; 'Longboards' are based on the 1960s style of surfboard and are most commonly associated with a graceful style of surfing rather than high performance; 'Bodyboards' refer to synthetic floating mats usually ridden by lying on the stomach. The category of 'Other' refers to kneeboards, wave skis, and bodysurfing.

APPENDIX 4

## Surfers' Questionnaire

Date.....

Locale
1.Time..... 2. Location.....

3. Approximate number of surfers at the location .....

About You
4. Age..... 5. Gender.....

6. Occupation:

a) •Unemployed.....
b) •Employed:
i) Full-time.....
ii) Part-time.....
iii) Salary/wage earner.....
iv) Self employed.....
v) Other (specify).....
.....
vi) Employed as.....
.....
c) •Student:
i)Full-time.....
ii) Part-time.....

iii) Primary.....
iv) Secondary.....
v) Tertiary.....

7. Annual gross income:

a) •Fully dependent upon financial support.....
b) •Up to $10,000.....
c) •Between $10,000 and $20,000....
d) •Between $20,000 and $40,000 ...
e) •Between $40,000 and $60,000 ...
f) •Between $60,000 and $80,000 ....
g) •Greater than $80,000.....

About your surfing

8. Years surfing.....

9. Have there been any breaks from surfing for a year or more? .....
9.1. If so how many and for how long each time? .....
.....
9.2. Why did you have the breaks? .....
.....

9.3 Why did you come back? .....
.....

10. On average, how frequently do you surf throughout the year?
a) •Less than once a month.....
b) •Less than once a week.....
c) •Less than once a day.....
d) •Once a day.....
e) •More than once a day.....

11. Are you a member of the following surfing organizations:
a) •Surfing Australia.....
b) •Surfriders Foundation.....
c) •Boardriders Club.....
d) •SLSA.....
c) •Other.....

12. Have you ever been in a surfing competition?.....
12.1 If not why not?.....
.....
12.2 If so do you still compete? .....

13. How important is competitive surfing to you:
a) •Very important.....
b) •Important.....
c) •Not Very important.....
d) •Not at all important.....

14. Do you feel that their is anything wrong with having surfing competitions? .....
14.1 If so what and why? .....
.....
.....

15. Do you wear surf label clothing?
a) •Some.....
b) •A Lot.....
c) •None.....

16. Do you ride a:
a) •Bodyboard.....
b) •Longboard.....
c) •Shortboard.....
d) •Surf ski.....
e) •Body surf.....
f) •Kneeboard.....

17. Do you feel positively(+), negatively(-), or ambivalent(O) towards those who ride:
a) •Bodyboards.....
b) •Longboards.....
c) •Shortboards.....

d) •Surf skis.....
e) •Body surfers.....
f) •Kneeboards.....

18. How many different surf videos would you have watched in the past 12 months?.....

19. How many surfing magazines would you have bought in the past 12 months?.....

20. What is your favourite magazine?.....

21. Surfing has become a probationary Olympic sport. Is this:

a) •Good.....
b) •Bad.....
c) •Not sure.....
d) •Don't care.....

21.1 Why?.....
.....
.....

22. What keeps you surfing?.....
.....
.....
.....

23. Have you ever had professional coaching?.....